Education
Gender and Empowerment :
Perspectives from South Asia

UNESCO
New Delhi

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Foreword

Empowerment has become an over-used term, but it remains an essential concept. Put most simply, it means developing the capacity and means to take greater control of one's life without infringing on the rights of the others. It is a process of individual and community transformation that comes about through the provision of resources and by access and participation in social development.

Education is a primary tool for empowerment and an investment in human and social capital. Improving the educational levels of a community nurtures the cohesion of social networks. This contributes to collective empowerment and a better quality of life.

In education, as in all areas of life, issues of gender need to be constantly examined if social development is to be truly inclusive. This volume engages a number of these issues by citing case studies from a range of formal and non-formal contexts in south Asia: schooling, teacher training, adult literacy and training for women at both the micro and macro levels. The examples can help clarify issues of gender bias, discrimination and inequality and suggest possible strategies for change. The papers do not seek to represent a single viewpoint, but rather are intended to enable specialist contributors to present issues related to girls' education in South Asia in greater depth and breadth, with a particular emphasis on social inclusion.

South Asia has a rich store of successful examples in advancing quality education. It is important that these are shared and built on if there is to be an overall improvement throughout the region. We hope that this volume will promote the momentum and extol good practices to all engaged in education policy and implementation in this region.

Minja Yang
Director, UNESCO New Delhi Office
UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka

Preface

This collection of papers, developed by Adhyayan for UNESCO New Delhi, analyses the issue of education, gender and empowerment in the context of South Asia from various perspectives. It is part of a series of initiatives undertaken by UNESCO New Delhi to expand the base of knowledge and information related to education and gender. The papers include analyses of policies and trends at a macro level from various perspectives, as well as the life stories and experiences of individuals and organizations at the micro level. The reflective analysis of the practitioners lends special weight to this volume. This mixture of approaches is intentional and follows the understanding of feminist theory that there is a variety of valid ways to undertake analysis and create knowledge.

The response to the initial concept note seeking contributions from selected academics and practitioners was most positive and encouraging. I am delighted that this volume includes papers from some of the region's leading analysts and practitioners who have engaged themselves with the issues of gender, education and empowerment. All of them are busy professionals, and given the high premium on their time, their willingness to offer their work for no fee makes their contributions all the more valuable and deeply appreciated.

UNESCO hopes that this collection will succeed in generating further debate and arguments for a shift in education policies and practices, to make them geared more directly towards the most pressing issues of transformation that confront South Asian society.

Huma Masood
UNESCO New Delhi

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Contributors

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Ramya Subrahmanian is a research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex and has several titles and papers to her name on the issue of gender and education. She has been especially engaged with these issues in South Asia.

Education, Gender and Empowerment: The Unfinished Agenda in South Asia

An Introduction to the Collection of Papers

Empowerment is a commonly used notion in the context of gender equality. Empowerment is a process of gaining control – over self, over resources and over decision-making. It, therefore, necessarily implies a shift from one situation to the other regarding control over self, resources and decision-making, and exercise of choice, as the process of gaining control is reflected in a widening of choices. Kabeer (2004) defines empowerment as referring to "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them". She makes an important distinction between "first order" and "second order" choices. The first order choices are far more strategic and significant for defining the parameters of people's lives as compared to the second order, which are less consequential.

The notions of freedom, justice and equality are directly associated with the process of empowerment. Empowerment is a process of change from an unequal stage of power relations to a stage where powers are equally distributed and everyone has a sense of freedom. This is what makes "empowered" different from the "powerful" where one or a few groups of individuals are powerful and the others powerless. They are powerful holding power over the others. Power relations are unequal and unjust in such situations, and empowerment is a process of change in power relations. The process has significance in all situations where powers relations are not equal either between individuals or between groups. South Asian societies are highly stratified on the lines of caste, class, sex and religion, and these determine the power relations to a large extent.

The process of empowerment has an individual as well as a collective dimension. The outcomes and impacts of unequal relations and distribution of power, and therefore of any change therein, get reflected at both individual and collective levels. It is all the more important when it comes to gender. Empowerment in the context of gender equality refers to liberation from ideologies of oppression and stereotypes for both men and women. Women, who have been traditionally at the unequal end of power suffer more when they belong to the poor or other marginalized groups. The disadvantages of being a woman as well as being poor and socially marginalized get combined. A change in gender relations in such circumstances is important for women, but also for groups – poor or Dalit or otherwise. However, gender relations are also mostly unequal within each and every group, and in that sense cuts across all castes, classes and religious groups. Gender is a social construct, referring to the ways in which societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. Gender is a conceptual category referring to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, and roles and responsibilities. Femininity does not exist in isolation to masculinity. Gender relations are neither natural nor given but they are constructed to make unequal relations seem natural and can be naturalized under the pressure of socialization.

Gender relations are guided by widely prevalent patriarchy in most parts of the world, definitely so in South Asia, barring a few small groups. It creates an undue pressure on both boys and girls to live up to the established norms of masculinity and femininity. If the girls face undue pressure of

being submissive and unquestioning, boys have the tremendous weight of becoming breadwinners, unemotional and protectors. This also leads to various forms of inequality and disparity between men and women impacting their capacities and lives in a significant manner. It is in the interest of both men and women to move away from the existing unequal relations of gender.

Education with its potential for promoting self-recognition and positive self-image, stimulating critical thinking, deepening the understanding of the structures of power, including gender, and creating an expanding framework of information, knowledge and choices, is central to empowerment. However, education does not necessarily stimulate critical thinking and expand understanding of structural or other forms of inequalities. Therefore, the question is whether education, in its current, dominant form that facilitates the widening of a few particular kinds of information and skill-formation, necessarily facilitates empowerment? Whether the nature and character of education facilitates change at various levels – self, family, society and economy – in a manner that power relations experience a shift? On the other hand, it is also important to understand that the very participation as well as the nature of participation of girls or women in education depends partially on the enabling environment created by social and economic policies. Therefore, the question in this context is whether social and economic policies and practices are facilitating educational participation of girls/ women? Whether the nature of participation of girls/ women is such that it leads to a significant shift in existing gender relations? These are some of the key issues that the papers in this volume are trying to address.

The South Asian Context

South Asia unfortunately has the highest level of gender disparities in education participation rates. About 48 per cent of the world's adult illiterates live in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, nearly two-thirds being women.[1] The estimates for out-of-school children in the primary school age group varies with different sources, but there is uniformity in showing that gender disparities are the highest, with the proportion of girls being significantly greater than boys in South Asia. Table 1 shows that South Asia is next to sub-Saharan Africa in terms of the number of out-of-primary-school children and that the proportion of out-of-school girls is higher in the former. Therefore, it is clear that apart from the nature of education and the learning experiences, even access to education and schooling are a major issue for girls in South Asia. Nevertheless, there has been significant growth in girls' enrolment over the past few years, especially at primary levels. As a consequence, the gender disparities have reduced to some extent. The gains in enrolment are more obvious in terms of gross rather than net enrolment ratios (Tables 2 and 3).

Though the region as a whole is backward in terms of gender disparities in education, the situation is not the same everywhere. Sri Lanka has been ahead of the others and was joined first by Maldives and then by Bangladesh in the recent past in achieving a high level of gender parity in primary school participation rates. The gains are spectacular in Bangladesh in view of the high population and high level of poverty in the country. Secondary school participation rates, however, are not high anywhere except Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, gender disparities do not exist in Maldives and Bangladesh even at secondary level, though the participation rates are in general not as high as at the primary level for both boys and girls (Table 4). India and Nepal have also demonstrated significant improvements. Gender disparities are the highest in school participation in Pakistan at both the primary and secondary levels.

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[1] Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2006.

Table 1 : Number of Out-of-Primary-School Children (1998/ 2002)

Regions	1998 (in thousands)			2002 (in thousands)		
	Total	Female	% Female	Total	Female	% Female
Sub-Saharan Africa	44581	23933	54	40370	22003	55
Arab States	8491	4991	59	6906	4025	58
Central Asia	775	400	52	635	341	54
East Asia and the Pacific	8309	4151	50	14782	7372	50
South and West Asia	35722	23189	65	30109	17411	58
Latin America and the Caribbean	3620	1997	55	2084	1226	59
North America and Western Europe	1885	918	49	2421	1101	45
Central and Eastern Europe	3340	1830	55	2569	1366	53

Source : EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006, UNESCO.

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratios at Primary Level Education in Selected South Asian Countries

Country	1998/ 1999			2002-03/ 2003-04		
	Boys	Girls	GPI	Boys	Girls	GPI
Bangladesh	107.7	104.2	0.97	94.1	97.7	1.04
Bhutan	NA	NA	NA	82.1	61.5	0.75
India	106.9	88.2	0.83	110.6	104.2	0.94
Maldives	133.5	134.6	1.01	119.0	117.0	0.98
Nepal	125.7	97.9	0.78	126.1	112.0	0.89
Pakistan	NA	NA	NA	79.6	56.6	0.71
Sri Lanka	110.7	107.6	0.97	110.8	110.1	0.99

NA: Not available/ not accessible; GPI: Gender Parity Index.

Source: i.   EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2006, UNESCO except for Bhutan.

ii.   *Study on Quality of Basic/ Primary Education, A paper prepared for UNESCO by Policy and Planning Division, Department of Education, Thimphu, Bhutan, May 2003 for Bhutan.*

Table 3: Net Enrolment Rates at Primary Education Level in Selected South Asian Countries

Country	1998/ 1999			2002-03/ 2003-04		
	Boys	Girls	GPI	Boys	Girls	GPI
Bangladesh	85.6	83.9	0.98	82.4	85.7	1.04
Bhutan	NA	NA	NA	58.4	47.2	0.80
India	NA	NA	NA	93.4	77.4	0.82
Maldives	99.4	100.0	1.01	92.2	92.6	1.00
Nepal	76.1	60.3	0.79	74.6	66.0	0.88
Pakistan	NA	NA	NA	67.5	50.0	0.74
Sri Lanka	NA	NA	NA	99.7	100.0	1.00

NA: Not available/ not accessible; GPI: Gender Parity Index.

Source : i.   *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, 2005 and 2006, UNESCO – For all countries except Bhutan and India.

ii.   Jha, Jyotsna (2004), *EFA in South Asia Analytical Study on Dakar Goals* (Series Goal 5), UNESCO, New Delhi – For Bhutan and India.

Table 4: Gross Enrolment Ratios at Secondary Stages of Education in Selected South Asian Countries (2002-3/ 2003-4)

Country	1998/ 1999			2002-03/ 2003-04		
	Boys	Girls	GPI	Boys	Girls	GPI
Bangladesh	43.3	41.5	0.96	45.0	50.2	1.12
Bhutan	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.74
India	54.4	38.1	0.70	58.5	46.7	0.80
Maldives	35.7	37.3	1.05	62.8	71.3	1.15
Nepal	41.2	29.3	0.71	50.4	39.2	0.78
Pakistan	NA	NA	NA	26.2	18.6	0.71
Sri Lanka	NA	NA	NA	84.2	88.9	1.06

NA :   Not available/ not accessible; GPI: Gender Parity Index.

Source: i.   EFA Global Monitoring Report-2006, UNESCO except for Bhutan.

ii.   *Study on Quality of Basic/ Primary Education, A paper prepared for UNESCO by Policy and Planning Division, Department of Education, Thimphu, Bhutan, May 2003 for Bhutan.*

Increased schooling participation of both girls and boys makes the issue of education and empowerment more relevant. Education needs to lead to empowerment and societal change if the gains in school participation are to be improved and sustained. The question arises, how does one examine whether education is facilitating empowerment or not? What signifies change and whether policies and practices are geared towards promoting change? Whether power relationships are undergoing any change and if education has any role? Whether these can be examined and understood at macro levels or micro, individual levels? Measurement of empowerment has been a contentious subject. Without going into the issue of measurement per se, this collection presents an analysis of the situation from different perspectives in a manner that provides a deep insight into the relationship between education, gender and empowerment on the one hand, and the challenges that remain in the region on the other.

Education, Gender and the Different Facets of Empowerment

Asraf and Farah examine the relationship between education and women's empowerment through the analysis of the life histories of five women teachers: Fatima, Zehra, Khadija, Saira and Rabia, belonging to the mountainous northern areas of Pakistan. They are among the first group of women in their families and villages to receive formal school education and be employed. The paper locates the analysis within the larger social and political realities of Pakistan where education for girls has become accessible only since the 1970s. Gender segregation is a dominant rule in the patriarchal Pakistani society where men and women occupy different ideological and social spaces. The concept of family honour is strictly associated with women's sexual behaviour restricting their social mobility. Democracy is not yet institutionalized and the fragile political situation led to adoption of certain discriminatory laws during the late 1970s that enhanced women's oppression and reduced their presence on the public scene. The situation, the paper points out, is changing for the better, under the present regime. One of the most significant reforms in this direction has been the reservation of seats for women in parliament, increasing their share from 3.4 to 33 per cent.

The paper provides a fascinating account of these women teachers facing a continuous challenge of balancing their work and home responsibilities; the demands of wifehood, motherhood and their chosen profession. It is an account of compromises and negotiations, frustrations and achievements, and of change, albeit undoubtedly a limited and a long-drawn one. They were all married early and four of them joined teaching after completing high school, having been denied access to higher education because of the long distances to school, poor economic standing of their parents and the societal attitude towards women's mobility. Having become part of their husbands' extended families at an early age, the demands of their reproductive roles and intensive engagements in family care, farming chores and cattle rearing did not allow them to study as regular students in professional and academic institutions located mostly in cities outside the region. The paper analyses the tension, which also led to a sense of guilt among some of them, that they faced in the process of proving that being educated and working did not mean they could not be 'good' wives, 'good' mothers and 'good' family members to the extended family. This brings out the 'fear of change' that stops parents from sending girls to schools in such societies, referred to by Subrahmanian in her paper.

It is obvious that earning cash income like other male family members did not change the traditional expectations of the ascribed familial role and they were constantly engaged in negotiating their different needs through the strategy of reciprocity in the form of compensatory work and contributing to the family's income pool. However, the paper clearly shows that they were also engaged in negotiating their positions as educated women within their families and communities by challenging some of their society's patriarchal norms that control relationships between men and women. They attempted to reshape traditional task division by engaging their male offspring and husbands in traditionally feminine tasks with varying degrees of success. It gave them confidence and the ability to negotiate their positions in society. Similarly, they appropriated the inappropriate task of "women

walking alone in public", which is important in a society where it is not allowed, and had it viewed with respect. Their greatest achievement came in the shape of decisions regarding their children's upbringing, education and employment. The identity of the "educated mother" added a sense of responsibility, and they negotiated these decisions with greater ease and confidence. While this, on the one hand reflects their confidence and negotiating powers, ironically, it also shows their adherence to the deep-rooted societal norm where women are expected to "sacrifice" their own betterment for their families but similar decisions are not acceptable for their children.

The paper clearly establishes (a fact asserted elsewhere in the literature on women's empowerment) that though they were neither able to demonstrate complete autonomy nor gain control over the conditions that had always governed their lives, their education enabled them to be persistent in challenging gender division of labour within their families and to assert certain strategic decisions regarding their own as well as their children's lives. There are various facets of empowerment, embedded in different social and political realities, and it is important to appreciate those if the relationship between education and empowerment is to be understood. The limitations of education acting as a means of transforming gender relations also became obvious, especially in a situation where the curriculum does not focus on these aspects at all. The paper concludes that the education system itself needs to be transformed for greater awareness if it has to act as a tool of social transformation.

The next three papers provide examples of what happens when the system and curriculum are designed to change gender and other power relations directly. Ranganathan analyses three small-scale girls' education programmes in three different parts of India and establishes the value of a reformed curriculum that Ashraf and Farah argue in favour of. Bhog and Joshi, in a fine, reflective paper on a feminist organization analyse their own experiences of working as a resource group with seven poor, Dalit, rural women who bring out a newspaper that competes with mainstream newspapers in one of the "backward" regions of India. Jamil analyses the experiences of a women's literacy programme based on the tenets of empowerment being implemented in Sindh in Pakistan.

Despite approaching empowerment differently, all three papers establish the need for integrating gender into the curriculum, a conclusion Ashraf and Farah also arrive at. An interesting fact is that all examples where education has facilitated empowerment, going beyond the basic changes, are from outside the formal system of education whereas the women teachers whose life histories are analysed by Ashraf and Farah are products of mainstream formal schools. The question is what stops formal education systems from integrating gender in curricular reforms? Bhog and Joshi provide an insight into the issue when they narrate the incident of a formal-school, male teacher's extreme reaction of wanting to commit suicide on seeing the use of the feminine gender as a norm for a citizen in a civics textbook. Subrahmanian in her paper on social policy, education and gender in India, and Mahmood in her paper on Bangladesh also help understand this phenomenon to some extent.

Ranganathan analyses three micro initiatives, two of which were undertaken in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Gujarat by CARE, an international non-governmental organization, in collaboration with local NGOs, and the third, an initiative in the state of Rajasthan by SARD, a large, national non-governmental organization. She argues that in order to make education lead to empowerment not only do the concepts of equality, equity and empowerment need to be at the centre of education but they also need to be defined in operational terms, reflecting the contextually embedded understanding of what they actually mean and imply. Through her analysis she establishes that these three programmes have succeeded in bringing a change in girls' lives owing to this clarity of thought and integration of the same in their approach and action.

The social reality of the contexts where these programmes were operating was not very different from the one described by Ashraf and Farah in Pakistan. The social reality of girls include living in a

patriarchal set-up, being socialized into traditional feminine gender roles, leading lives characterized by social restrictions and taboos, and living in a society which undervalues girls and reinforces a culture of obedience and compliance to existing social norms and standards among them. However, these realities play differently in different regions. In UP and the Muslim concentrated Mewat region of Rajasthan, it meant restricted mobility, engagement in household/ field-related chores and becoming victims of early marriages and motherhood. In the desert region of Kutch in Gujarat, it meant spending hours daily in collecting water and doing embroidery for their own dowry. The preference for religious education and the perceived lack of relevance of general education for girls by Muslim parents add another dimension in Mewat.

The UP programme, know as Udaan (literally translated, the flight) centred its approach on a fresh and clearly targeted curriculum in its primary education course for adolescent girls. Empowerment with a focus on building perspectives of diversity and equity, and developing knowledge, skills and attitudes to deal with the world from a position of strength were the clearly stated objectives of the curriculum. A Social Learning Curriculum (SLC) was added to the subjects, language, mathematics and environmental studies with the aim of developing girls into self-confident individuals, who could think critically and visualize their own potential in the social context in which they lived. The emphasis is on an exploration of self and society through dialogue, role-plays, games, stories and projects. The curriculum was conceived and developed around the concept of "relationships" and interrelationships. The self of the learner was placed at the centre of several concentric circles that represent family and community, the larger society, institutions, ecology and the economy. The physical, social, economic and psychological barriers emanating from the belief system of the community were also taken into cognizance before designing the approach. These were replaced by a new set of assumptions, which reposed faith in the girls' abilities. A special feature of Udaan is the subliminal message of girls as capable and competent, achieving whatever they want, is communicated in both the subject and the social learning curriculum.

The Gujarat programme, known as AGLCs, can be viewed as an extension and adaptation of some elements of the Udaan approach. Language was accorded considerable importance as an effective medium in approaching and dealing with one's universe. The Social Learning Curriculum was an integral part aiming at making the girls acquainted with village institutions like the panchayat, its infrastructure facilities and also to engender in them a sense of confidence that they can participate and use these institutions and facilities. The larger issue of gender equity is addressed through enabling girls to function with greater autonomy and more control over their own lives and develop a questioning attitude about existing social norms, beliefs and practices prevalent in their villages. It equips them to reflect and question timid acceptance of prevailing gender stereotypes.

The nature of the SARD's work with adolescent girls in Mewat region can, according to the paper, best be understood as an intensive community development approach. Given a particular social situation, the major concern in this case was with creating readiness and acceptance for girls' education and then gradually getting the community to accept ownership for it. The focus was on skills like numeracy, literacy, thinking, reasoning and problem solving, with the belief that they would be able to use these in their everyday lives. Gender equity was not targeted as a separate issue. Given the context of their impending marriages and family life, SARD decided to develop a programme centred on "family life education" for adolescent girls. This included themes related to health, nutrition, bodily changes, sexuality, reproductive health, cleanliness and hygiene of the home, optimal family size, parenting, etc. The idea was to enhance their knowledge and understanding of these issues and build progressive attitudes. The main aim was to enable girls to understand that these were the domains in which they could make their presence known, take decisions and exercise their control. Empowerment was thus seen as the process through which girls would discover their own voice, personal space and agency, at least within the spheres where they have a definite role even in a traditional setting.

Based on a systematic impact evaluation of these programmes from the perspective of empowerment, the paper shows that these programmes have been successful in not only enhancing girls' access to schooling but that they also impact their self-images and thought processes in a such a manner that they were capable of negotiating for their own lives and questioning some of the unequal societal practices with confidence and ease. It was particularly evident in the case of Udaan where the curriculum supported by other interventions of the programme clearly aimed at bringing this transformation. The girls who had undergone this course demonstrated a holistic sense of self and identity, high aspirations regarding their own future and a clear sense of responsibility towards family and society. The AGLC girls also demonstrated a clear functional autonomy in the functional domains of dealing with institutions and the community in their immediate lives. An enhanced capacity of expression and the ability to relate to various forms of expression was also obvious. The paper considers the very incidence of enhanced girls' participation in general education as an indicator of success of the approach in Mewat.

The paper highlights the focus on girls discovering their potentials and nurturing them in these programmes instead of creating a sense of deprivation and incapacity. This is reflected in the fact that: "The Udaan educated girls thus expressed a visible sense of pride in being able to cycle, visit the market on their own, talk to strangers, dialogue with their older brothers and fathers, share their views about issues, discharge bank and post office-related tasks, assist in the family business and participate in family decision-making (Ranganathan and Jaimini, 2005)". For the girls of the AGLCs and Kishori Samoohs in Mewat, the realization that they could think on their own, ask questions, express their own views, commute on their own and perform academic tasks similar to their male relatives, enabled them to see themselves as members of their communities from a position of strength as opposed to one of subordination that they had earlier been socialized into. Their educational experiences helped them realize that the existing gender beliefs were not fixed or unquestionable and could be rethought and re-envisaged. This paper clearly lends weight to Ashraf and Farah's argument that the education system and the curriculum need to be reformed if education has to lead to empowerment.

Bhog and Joshi in this reflective paper on their experiences of working with a group of neo-literate women bringing out a newspaper, *Khabar Lahariya*, in the Bundelkhand region of UP examine the connections between education, gender and citizenship. On one hand, it is an analysis of Nirantar's (a feminist organization working on education) engagement with this small group of women as a process of education where gender is integrated, not an add-on, and on the other, of the differentiated experiences that women bring into the process of claiming citizenship in a society where power relations are unequal at various levels of caste, class and gender.

While giving an account of the journey of this group of seven poor, Dalit and tribal neo-literate women from rural India, the paper discusses the limits and challenges that face the process of education in the context of gender. The first is the limits of a development programme, however progressive and clearly defined it might be. For example, Mahila Samakhya (MS), one of the most celebrated and successful programmes working in the area of women's education with a clear focus on empowerment, had facilitated the printing of the *Mahila Dakiya*, the precursor of *Khabar Lahariya*. However, when it tried to make this group convert it into an independent priced newspaper, it faced tremendous difficulties. This shows the limits of a development programme. It does not undermine the role that MS played but it does show that it could go only so far and no further.

The challenges that poor, Dalit and tribal women faced in the process of publishing the newspaper are multi-layered, and occur at various levels. They range from developing the skill of information gathering to crisp and objective reporting; progressing from covering mainly "women's issues" to wider social and political issues of accountability; dealing with animosity and threats emanating from reports against corrupt practices, etc. It is an internal struggle for them to decide whether they

should report against a corrupt women sarpanch, and an external one, when despite recognition by the mainstream press, they do not receive invitations for important press conferences. It is a struggle simply because they are women, they are poor and they are Dalit in a world of men and upper-caste journalists belonging to mainstream newspapers.

Covering the General Elections, 2004 posed a major challenge to these women journalists bringing up a number of issues about their citizenship. They had never covered party politics and despite the fact that they had participated in voting, it was the men in their families who had taken all decisions related to their vote and choice of candidates. The whole process of preparing for and covering the elections added a new dimension to their experiences. Apart from adding new skills and knowledge, it was a process of realization that they were citizens of the country with certain rights and responsibilities of tremendous value.

The paper asserts that the process that empowers these women to deal with these challenges is the real process of education, where political aspects are not separated from pedagogical aspects of learning. Nirantar's work on gender covers a wide and holistic engagement with women's issues and their lived realities. The process of contextualizing refers to performing the task of building knowledge by being aware of the political, social and cultural marginalizations that groups or individuals experience. The paper concludes on the basis of reflections on this engagement that: "Engendering citizenship is not merely getting women to do what men do in the public arena. It is a continual process of questioning what is seen as the public arena and to recognize that women come into this arena as women and their experience must inform, recreate and expand the boundaries of how we understand the public." It is obvious that here empowerment does not refer only to access and control of knowledge, among other things, but goes beyond that by adding another dimension of enriching the knowledge by adding new perspectives.

Jamil takes us back to a development initiative, Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme (WLEP), undertaken by the Sindh Education Foundation in Pakistan. This is a process-led programme, deriving some of the aspects of design and implementation from the acclaimed Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme in India, where lay the seeds of *Khabar Lahariya*. The importance of WLEP lies in the fact that like Udaan, AGLC and SARD's interventions, analysed by Ranganathan in her paper, this also tried to aim at empowerment by design. The methods and tools adopted by WLEP are participatory, allowing women to express themselves and determine their choices.

The Village Women's Collective or Goth Nari Sangat (GNS), as it is called in the local language, forms the core of all WLEP activities, as has been the case with MS in India. This is a collective of about 100 to 150 naris (members), with ten to fifteen small groups within the GNS. GNS brings together women to share and reflect upon their lives, their joys and sorrows, constraints and opportunities, and the development of a collective identity in the process. Women are exposed to different education and creative opportunities, and are trained and encouraged to take leadership in education and other issues that concern their lives. In the course of time they were expected to act as change agents and undertake responsibilities that in most cases they successfully fulfilled. However, over time, the WLEP appeared to be suffering from many constraints including those arising from lack of institutional linkages with the education department, focus on literacy rather than on holistic empowerment, and the time and resource constraints of a process-based intervention. Unlike MS, in most parts where it has been operational in India, the programme did not appear to respond to emerging needs and transformed itself largely into autonomous bodies. Therefore, given the huge potential it has, the paper argues that there is a need to give it a new direction by not only building an agenda around the issue of equity, but also through an expanded institutional and policy platform intended for scaling up beyond the limited geographical area.

Education, Gender and Labour Market Participation

The extent and nature of labour market participation by women is an important indicator of women's position in a society. Education has direct linkages with labour market participation of both men and women. Dasgupta and Chandra, in their paper provide an insightful perspective of education, gender and labour market participation in South Asia. It is widely known that labour markets are highly segregated into "male" and "female" jobs worldwide, which is much more so in South Asia. The disadvantaged position of women workers in the labour market is just one more reflection of the social construct of gender. Dasgupta and Chandra provide empirical data to establish how this region records some of the lowest Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) for women in Asia. While the LFPR for men hovers around 85 per cent for the subcontinent, there is stark variation in LFPR for women, with Sri Lanka recording the highest rate at 40 per cent and Pakistan recording the lowest rate at 16.6 per cent. In Bangladesh, while still much lower than men's, the women's labour force participation rates have risen due the huge demand for female employment in the RMG sector.

The paper argues that labour force statistics largely define work in such a way that much of women's unpaid work within the home (other than care work) is not included as work and is a major issue. A related fact is that in recent years women's LFPR has actually fallen in some South Asian countries, including India. Experts believe that this fall could be because of the way data is collected, but it could also be argued that the fall is a reflection of the labour market situation in some regions in India where poor women have been crowded out of limited employment opportunities and become what is best known as "discouraged workers", but statistically counted as "inactive".

The paper shows that women in South Asia tend to be more concentrated in poor quality jobs in the agricultural sector and in the informal non-agricultural sector. The participation of women in technical and business-related courses in tertiary education is particularly low, restricting their entry to better-paid jobs for which the demand is increasing as a result of globalization. Women's participation in the informal economy, outside agriculture, is generally concentrated around the casual wage-worker, low-paid own-account work, domestic work or piece-rate home work. The paper highlights the fact that wage differentials are high in the region, this being most stark in Pakistan where women (in the informal sector), on average, earn only 46 per cent of what men earn. The situation is the most favourable in Sri Lanka where women earn around 86 per cent of the income earned by men. In India women earn on the average about 63.7 per cent of what men earn, and in Bangladesh, the gap is larger with women earning on the average only about 58 per cent of what men earn. Dasgupta and Chandra undertake a regression analysis of data from Indian households to examine if the wage differentials between men and women can be attributed to the gender gap and find it to be true. The analysis shows that after adjusting for other factors such as education, experience, urban or rural status, and social category, rate of growth of earnings is likely to decline by 14 per cent if the respondent is a woman rather than a man.

Through an analysis of a few case studies of women workers in India the paper shows how most of them associated their poor labour market status to their lack of education. These women also want to make up for their own lack of schooling by educating their children. However, despite these perceptions, in view of the empirical evidences that the relationship between education and the labour market are inconclusive, the paper examines the household level NSSO data from India to study the trends in women's progress in the labour market and its links to education. The analysis establishes that education to some extent has a role in improving labour market status. It is especially clear in the fact that even a few years of education affects the incidence of casualization substantially. It is also evident from the fact that with education the engagement of women in jobs demanding higher levels of skills increases while the job with low-skill requirements decline.

The paper argues that improved access to education and skills remains one of the major means of achieving gender equality in the labour market at a time when labour markets are becoming

increasingly flexible and the global production system requires more and more modern skills. It goes on to make a case for revamping the existing training systems in South Asian countries to make them more relevant to women and the informal sector. However, in the end, this paper also argues for gender sensitive, flexible, socially relevant education using both classroom and out-of-classroom strategies to change mindsets forcing society to re-evaluate women's work, taking into account women's unpaid work as care givers at home. Gender-based discrimination in the labour market needs to be placed within the context of gender stereotypes and perceptions of gender roles in society, and reformed education can be one of the tools towards that change.

In her paper "Gender, Education and the Labour Market in Sri Lanka", Jayaweera argues that despite the achievement of gender parity in access to education as a consequence of progressive policies, a range of factors have prevented the majority of women from translating their education gains into economic rewards through employment. This is despite the fact that the country has the highest LFPR for women in South Asia. The range of factors includes expansion of secondary education without science facilities in non-city areas leading to significant inter and intra district imbalances and a consequent concentration of girls and women in the humanities fields. Prevalent gender perceptions have not been challenged by education as educational materials continue to reflect gender role stereotypes. Societal behavioural expectations too, continue to demand that girls be passive and docile, and boys aggressive and the main decision-makers. In education, she argues that the home economics syndrome still influences the choice of vocational-related optional courses, translating itself in the concentration of women in "feminine" courses. At the university level, women students are poorly represented in engineering and technology courses. The paper argues that neither school nor higher education has attempted consciously to empower women to challenge negative norms and oppressive social practices or to develop their personhood.

Analysing the labour market trends, the paper reveals that women's LFPR has declined to about 32 per cent in the post-1990 period after reaching a peak of nearly 40 per cent in 1990. This fall, however, is mainly attributed to a shift from formal to informal labour market engagements not captured by the statistics. Unemployment rates have been consistently higher for women as compared to men as the pace of economic growth did not match the pace of educational growth. The paper argues that the programmes that were introduced to ease unemployment were also discriminatory towards women to the point where the jobs that were offered were mainly that of teachers, and therefore a "feminine" job. As in the case of India, women workers in Sri Lanka are largely concentrated in unpaid family labour in agriculture and poorly paid casual work. The percentage of the female labour force in management positions was abysmally low at 0.4 per cent in 1981 and only 0.8 per cent in 2003 (Labour Force Survey). Empirical evidences show the presence of bias among employers against appointing women to managerial positions of authority.

The feminization of the labour force in the export-oriented garment industry characterized by long working hours, occupational health hazards, low pay and job insecurity is becoming a reality in Sri Lanka as well. The majority of subcontracted workers in the peripheral or external labour market, that expanded to reduce production costs, were women who had the opportunity of combining economic and domestic roles. However, this was at the cost of piece-rate payments often lower than the basic minimum wage, much of which was siphoned off their income by subcontractors. Jayaweera reinforces Dasgupta and Chandra's argument that discriminatory practices of the labour market against women are a reflection of the gender stereotypes that exist in the society.

While analysing the relationship between education and labour market participation, Jayaweera argues that though education determines the nature of the job, the better educated being engaged in so-called white collar jobs, the unemployment rates rise with the level of education, being highest for the most educated ones. On the basis of empirical evidences based on inter-generational studies, the paper argues that improvement in educational attainment has not necessarily meant a change in

occupational status, especially in the plantation sector. Though the social composition of the university student population changed radically from its elite, professional family base in 1950 to a rural and more egalitarian socio-economic milieu by the mid-1960s, the widely prevalent unemployment limited their upward occupational mobility. Women were particularly disadvantaged in this respect. The paper asserts that the policy interventions are not of much help as prevalent gendered norms and the gender role assumptions guide policy makers as well. She argues that the use of low cost female labour as "secondary earners", the deskilling of educated women workers and the "housewifisation" of women in rural development programmes reflect this amply. This paper brings out the reality of continued gender differentiations in various forms in a country where gender parity was achieved in education long ago.

Education, Gender and Social Policy

Mahmud analyses the issue of social policy, education and gender in Bangladesh primarily from a historical perspective. The paper asserts that despite having made significant achievements in enrolments and gender parity in school education, the country faces considerable challenges in the shape of continued gender differentiation in completion of school, learning competencies and performance, as well as in opportunity for lives and livelihoods. Bangladesh's experiences appear somewhat similar to those of Sri Lanka where progressive policy interventions led to significant gains in school participation but deep-entrenched gender divides in society are reflected in labour market segmentation, livelihood choice differentiations and women's participation in the public domain in general.

The paper traces the upsurge in demand for girls' education leading to significant gains in achieving near universalization and gender parity at the primary level in Bangladesh to a combination of macroeconomic shifts and proactive, progressive education policies. Education remained largely confined to the elite in the post-colonial, pre-independence era in both rural and urban areas. Rural poor, largely engaged in agricultural wage-work or subsistence farming, did not consider education a priority. Education was expensive and not easily accessible. The post-independent era of the 1970s was characterized by a sectoral shift in household income sources from agricultural to non-farm livelihoods like trading, labour selling and service, combined with increased migration to urban areas induced by a number of natural and other forms of crises. This change led to an increased demand for education that remained largely confined to boys. The 1990s witnessed a clear policy commitment resulting in unprecedented expansion of school provisioning in the country. This was supported by a number of interventions that directly compensated the family's cost on education, impacting their demand for schooling. The homogeneous nature of Bangladesh's society also helped in making this shift in demand relatively easier. Weakening of the norm of girls' restricted public mobility resulting from the visible employment of a large number of adolescent girls from rural areas in the urban export garment industry also helped in making the social environment for adolescent girls' school attendance more favourable by the early 1990s.

The paper, however, argues that though some of the major interventions such as Food for Education (FFE) was well targeted towards the poor, it was not necessarily so in all cases. She makes special mention of how the world-acclaimed female stipend programme at the secondary level did not benefit girls from poor families as much as those from relatively richer families and thereby created a wealth gap. The absence of targeting the poor resulted in girls from relatively poor households opting out of secondary schools because of the fairly restrictive criteria (minimum days of attendance and class performance) that were difficult to meet without incurring additional expenditure, like private tuition and good clothes to attend school. The condition requiring parents to sign a bond that they would refrain from getting their daughters married while receiving stipends also contributed to excluding girls from poor households, who found it more costly to delay their daughters' marriages because of higher dowry demands for older girls. It also failed to reach girls in remote and underdeveloped

villages that were less likely to attract good quality teachers and offered little incentive to private providers. Thus, existing stipends helped girls from non-poor households to a greater extent in rural areas, while poor girls in urban areas were completely bypassed. The paper also raises the issue of the lack of focus on quality, which among other things has stopped education adopting a transformative character, important to change the deep-rooted unequal gender relations based on patriarchy.

Drawing on some global evidence, Subrahmanian develops an analytical framework for reviewing gender and education approaches, policies and practices from an integrated perspective. The paper argues that a "social policy" framework for education is necessary to broaden narrow and instrumentalist arguments and policy prescriptions in female education, to achieve the ambitious global time-bound targets of universal female schooling and women's empowerment, as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals. The paper develops the analytical frame based on Kabeer's (2003) understanding of "social" in development thinking as a concern with reproduction of life, the reproduction of labour and the reproduction of society, as three distinct but fundamentally interlinked aspects of human life. The relationship between reproduction of life and education is explained in terms of parental choices regarding schooling being often determined by customs, control over daughters' marriages and sexuality, and expectations of childbearing and care roles from female offspring.

The paper asserts that the reproduction of labour is related to girls' education in more than one way. Gender differentials mark child labour. The paper points out that a broad interpretation of the empirical literature suggests that the proportions in work and out-of-school are larger for girls than for boys in Asia. However, because of their primary engagement in household chores and sibling care, they are often more likely than boys to be classed as "inactive". In fact, the gender segmentation of work itself reflects the socialization effect of prevalent gender divides. Girls' participation in household-based wage work is often hidden as this is usually performed as part of family labour and not paid for separately. She also includes the issue of dowry, which often acts as a disincentive to women's education as evidenced by empirical studies, in the reproduction of labour. Reproduction of societal norms regarding gender differentiated through the schooling processes and systems is what represents the aspect of reproduction of society in her analytical frame. This includes the issues of the content of education – the processes of curriculum transaction on the one hand, and those related to the gender equitable impacts of budgetary allocations and planning priorities, on the other.

The paper advocates a serious and systematic evaluation of the policies and institutions, taking the agenda of gender justice at the centre. An appropriate evaluative framework in education, based on an understanding of education as embedded in wider social processes, is critical for this analysis. The need of the hour is to go beyond the minimalist approach of promoting "girls' education", and to evaluate education as embedded in wider social processes. The analytical frame suggested in the paper provides an approach that can be followed for such evaluation.

Conclusion

The reading of these papers makes it clear that there have been significant gains in terms of girls' and women's education, lives and livelihoods. However, a lot remains to be done if gender equality is to be achieved in the true sense. An overwhelming message derived from these papers is that in order to make education a tool of empowerment leading to substantive change in women's position and gender equality in different walks of life, the most crucial yet most neglected aspect of education is the curriculum, including its content and pedagogy. It comes out clearly that mainstream education even in its present form, where the emphasis is on information and a particular kind of skill-building with no focus on empowerment does bring some change in women's lives, livelihoods and positioning. However, this change does not succeed in transforming social norms and practices that put girls and women in a position of disadvantage in almost every sphere of life. Education in its current form does not challenge power relations in any significant manner. Education policies have succeeded in widening

opportunities for girls in varying degrees in different countries of this region, but they have not been aimed at equipping the learners to question unequal positioning, choices and lack of control.

The experiences of various examples from different parts of South Asia indicate that it is possible to develop and deliver empowerment-oriented education. But it demands commitment, clarity and a continuous engagement at various levels of policy, systems, institutions and processes. It is important to integrate gender and the notion of equality in the very approach at every stage and not as one of the add-ons that need lip service. The commitment to gender equality in real terms can come only when it is realized that achieving gender equality is also about making society as a whole more just and equal for everyone. It is not only about expanding women's rights and participation per se. This clarity would help in determining the nature of change and engagement that is required at different levels and aspects of the education policy, systems, institutions and processes.

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Education and Women's Empowerment: Re-Examining the Relationship

Dilshad Ashraf and Iffat Farah

The goal of empowering individuals and communities shapes and directs development discourse in contemporary societies. While the concept of empowerment is widely used, it has various interpretations in literature. Patel (1996) perceives empowerment as both a means and an end, a process and the result of a process. Batliwala (1994) explains embeddedness of 'power' within the concept of empowerment, which means control over resources such as material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. So, empowerment is manifested as a redistribution of power, whether between nations, classes, castes, genders, or individuals (Batliwala, 1994). Gaining more decision-making capacity, deepening an understanding of relations, configuring one's life and controlling conditions affecting one's life are recognized as the various dimensions of empowerment (Walters and Manicom, 1996). In a broad sense, empowerment is a process that helps individuals or communities to assert control over factors that affect their lives (Gibson, 1991). 'Autonomy' is used as an alternate expression for empowerment, which denotes one's ability to decide and act without any external pressure and control – apparently synonymous for empowerment.

Patel (1996) perceives women's empowerment as a process of confronting patriarchy, which must lead to the end of women's subordination. Similarly, Batliwala (1994) asserts that the goals of women's empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology (male domination and women's subordination), to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality (the family, caste, class, religion, educational processes and institutions, the media, health practices and systems, laws and civil codes, political processes, development models and government institutions), and to enable poor women to gain access to, and control of, both material and informational resources.

Many of these empowerment indicators overlap with the five levels of autonomy that Jejeebhoy (as cited in Robinson-Pant, 2004) has used to explain outcomes of education for women. For instance, her analysis of the ways in which women's education affects their behaviour describes five levels of autonomy, which overlaps with indicators of women's empowerment: knowledge autonomy, decision-making autonomy, physical autonomy, emotional autonomy, economic and social autonomy (self-reliance). Despite some similarities between the concepts of autonomy and empowerment, both differ in the scope and degree of control that women can exercise over their own affairs of life. Empowerment appears to be an ideal state in which women are ultimately able to assert control over the factors that affect their lives. While autonomy seems to be an earlier stage in the process of empowerment where women develop the ability to decide and act without any external pressure and control.

The focus of this paper is to re-examine the relationship between education and empowerment. The relationship between the two can be sought through the way education is perceived in the context of contemporary development discourse. For instance, the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations' Millennium Declaration 2000 recognize education as development that creates choices and opportunities for people, reduces the twin burdens of poverty and diseases and gives

people a stronger voice in society. Women's education is a recognized critical condition for women's empowerment – enabling them to gain greater access and control over material and knowledge resources in order to improve their lives and challenge the ideologies of discrimination and subordination (Khan and Mohammad, 2003). In line with this argument, one of the goals of the National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002) is empowerment of Pakistani women to help them realize their full potentials in all spheres of life. This policy identifies education as an important means towards the social empowerment of women in Pakistan. As a crosscutting theme, this policy recognizes education as vital for ensuring women's participation in mainstream social, economic and political fields. In other words, Pakistan's policy about women's development establishes Batliwala's (1994) definition of empowerment that it is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systematic forces that marginalize women in a given context. In other words, empowerment should aim at challenging and transforming structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination.

Some research studies (e.g. Sales, 1996; Jayaweera, 1999) examine the issue whether education empowers women and changes their lives, along with gender roles and relations within families and communities. Jayaweera (1999) in her analysis of Sri Lanka's historical development in achieving universal literacy and eliminating gender inequalities in access to education identifies that equal educational attainment does not translate into equal rewards in the labour market for girls and women. Furthermore, while literacy levels are high, most women in Sri Lanka face subordination in the domestic division of labour, and a significant number experience domestic violence.

Sales (1996) in her analysis of a field-based teacher training programme in northern Pakistan finds that this particular programme of teacher development was accessible by a large number of village women because it had successfully adapted itself to village norms (e.g. a schedule that allowed women to fulfil their everyday domestic responsibilities and did not require frequent travelling away from families). But the very fact that the field-based programme works within the constraints of the female domain militates against its ability to create professionals who are able to participate fully in the development of the education system. In the context of this case study, women were able to enter the teaching profession and gain access to training, as long as their activities remained within the commonly accepted female domain. This is circumscribed both geographically, by the expectation that they will not travel outside their village, away from their families, agricultural commitments and communal scrutiny; and socially, in the sense that they must not take on an autonomous role beyond the control of men or indeed in authority over them. Hence, Sales (1996) did not find enough evidence to support the theory that education led to empowering women teachers in the patriarchal mountain communities. Jayaweera (1999) has also raised the doubt whether education in general empowers women to take control of their lives in a society that reinforces and perpetuates unequal power distribution between men and women.

As a background to the above discussion, the paper re-examines the relationship between education, gender and empowerment. First, it reviews the current situation of women's education in Pakistan. Second, based on the findings of research on the life histories of five Pakistani women teachers, it describes and discusses the contributions and limitations of education in empowering women within the family and in public life. Third, it critiques the assumptions of a strong causal relationship between education and women's empowerment, which underpins many of the education projects for girls and women and identifies factors that mitigate such a relationship. Finally, the paper makes recommendations for strengthening education in a manner in which it could support women's empowerment.

Status of Women's Education in Pakistan

The constitution of Pakistan (1973) promises equal rights to all citizens, repudiates discrimination on the basis of sex alone, and affirms steps to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of life.

The constitutional assertion and emphasis on equal rights and opportunities for women was meant to address the traditionally low social status and minimal participation of women in most social sectors. In the years 1949-50, two years after Pakistan's independence in 1947, the overall gross participation rates at the primary and secondary levels were as low as 16 per cent [1] and 9 per cent respectively. These figures were even lower for female participation, i.e. 4 per cent at the primary level and 3 per cent at the secondary level (Jalil, 1998).

To improve female participation in education, all the education policies formulated from the year 1970 to 1998 (and the most recent policy for the period 1998-2010) have unanimously committed to ensure the provision of primary education. Each of these policies also committed to promote girls' education. Pakistan is a signatory to international declarations and commitments made since 1990. One such commitment led Pakistan to pursue basic education as an integral part of its human development plan and as a means to eliminate all disparity including those related to gender (1992 Education Policy). As a result of these constant efforts, since the 1950s, the overall participation in education has increased significantly; although the pace of change has been slow particularly for women.

Farah and Shera's (2005) review of Pakistan's education policies and programmes indicates a steady but slow increase in the overall literacy rate over the last two decades from 25 per cent in 1980 to 35 per cent in 1991 and 45 per cent in 2001. Despite this general increase, gaps between male and female literacy rates have persisted over the years. The large number of dropouts could be one explanation for this persistent gender gap. A recently published report on education (Social Policy and Development Centre, 2003) shows an overall trend of increasing drop out within public primary schools, with female dropout rates rising faster than their male counterparts.

A comparison of enrolment at primary and secondary levels, according to Farah and Shera (2005), reveals that more girls as compared to boys drop out of school at the end of each stage of schooling. Less than half the girls enrolled in rural primary schools would enter middle school; about half of those enrolled in the middle would enter secondary school. More than half the boys at each level would reach the next level. The highest drop out of girls is at the stage of transition from lower to upper primary (Class III), and from primary to secondary. High school girls' dropout rates beyond primary school persist as a result of lack of opportunities, mobility issues, and traditions and cultural norms, constraining girls' and women's access to higher education, especially in the rural areas (Government of Pakistan, 2002).

Regardless of all efforts to increase girls' participation in education, the current estimated figures for 2003 show the female literacy rate at 38.57 per cent as compared to 61.93 per cent for the male literacy rate. Farah and Shera (1995) offer two ways to improve female literacy:

- Pakistani education policy and programming needs to include in its focus female education beyond primary and basic education.

- Goals and strategies of female education should be linked with other aspects of women's development.

In a context like Pakistan, women are generally deprived socially, politically and economically. Therefore, basic education alone can neither keep poor girls in school nor can it improve women's status in society. Therefore, Farah and Shera (2005) call for an effective integration of goals for female education with other aspects of their development.

Women's empowerment is a phenomenon that needs to be situated within the larger society. An overview of women's social standing may help a later discussion to examine the pragmatic concept of achieving Pakistani women's empowerment through education. Pakistani society is structured

according to a patriarchal social framework –men dominate all walks of life while women remain subordinate. Gender segregation is a dominant rule, according to which men and women occupy different ideological and social spaces. Moreover, the concept of family honour is strictly associated with women's sexual behaviour. Therefore, women's social mobility is restricted sometimes through purdah (literally, a veil) and at other times by gender segregation. Owing to Pakistan's consistent instable political situation, since 1947, women's general status in society has remained in focus. In this regard, some of the steps taken by a few governments will stay in the country's history. For example, as a part of the process of Islamization (reinforcing Islamic codes of conduct) Zia-ul-Haq, a former military ruler, enforced some discriminatory laws during the late 1970s that enhanced women's oppression in society. Zia also minimized women's presence on the public scene, including newspapers, television and advertisements and strictly enforced the traditional dress code in educational institutions. The present government, though it has its roots in yet another military intervention to end political unrest, has taken up an agenda of reform and good governance. In 2000, government increased the number of seats reserved for women in parliament from 3.4 per cent to 33 per cent. The resulting newly elected Parliament (elections held in 2000) included 74 women members, raising hopes of bringing about substantial changes in women's lives through legislation. With a somewhat increased freedom of expression, in recent years, the media has provided women a platform to voice their issues and their achievements publicly.

The brief analysis of the current situation, on the one hand, reveals the complexities of women's lives. On the other hand, this explicates the need to critically examine the concept of empowerment and its viability as a goal for Pakistani women. Recognizing education as a route to women's empowerment is an assumption that needs further elaboration in relation to the real-life experiences of Pakistani women. For further specific analyses of women's situation and to discuss the contributions and limitations of education in empowering women within their families and public lives, we use the life histories of five women teachers from the northern areas of Pakistan. Their life histories are pertinent as they highlight women's experiences in connection with the relationship between their lives and the broader social and cultural context, and hence, help us understand ideas that are taken for granted about women in the context of development discourses.

Women Teachers

The five women teachers; Fatima, Zehra, Khadija, Saira and Rabia, whose life histories are used to examine the relationship between education and women's empowerment, belong to the mountainous northern areas of Pakistan where they were born and brought up. It is significant to note that these women are among the first group of women in their families and villages to receive formal school education (education for girls has become accessible since the 1970s) and be employed. Conforming to the dominant norm of the region, however, most of them got married at an early age and became part of their husbands' extended families. Four of them joined teaching after completing their high school. The long distances to school, the poor economic standing of their parents and the societal attitude towards women's mobility were among the main factors that hindered these teachers' access to further schooling. Moreover, their reproductive roles and intensive engagements in their respective extended families that entailed family care, farming chores and cattle rearing, did not allow them to study as regular students in professional and academic institutions located mostly in cities outside the region.

The participants of the study enhanced their professional and academic qualifications either by attending training courses organized by their employers locally or through distance learning courses. During the data collection for the study, these women were teaching in different schools of the region. At that time, their teaching experiences ranged from 24 years for Fatima to 10 years for Rabia, the youngest teacher among the five. All of them had also received their Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree.

Also, they had acquired some professional training ranging from Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), Certificate in Educational Management (CEM) to Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC).

Social Setting

The traditional familial unit of the northern areas is a patrilineal (lineage only passes through male blood members) extended family of parents, sons and their wives and children, and unmarried daughters. This extended family as the basic unit of social control establishes the norms for male and female roles. In this patriarchal system, the father, or in his absence the next senior man, is the head of the household. As a result, both decision-making powers and economic control are vested in the hands of men.

Patrilineal mountain communities have a strong preference for boy children. Absence of a son is a socially valid reason for a man to marry another woman. Consequently, girls are treated differently from their male siblings, who get the best food, the best clothing and the best available opportunities for education. Women's behaviour outside the family home is subject to scrutiny. For example, women cannot go even on short journeys unless accompanied by a male relative; nor can they interact with men not related to them in unsupervised circumstances. Customarily, men walk ahead of the women in their company.

The time and space for women in indigenous mountain communities is of great significance. Some women's position in the extended household gets strengthened as they progress in their marital life and give birth to offspring particularly boys. For a long time, these "ruli-gus" (the Burushaski term for head woman) or "Mistress of the house" (Muller-Stellretch, 1979, p.156) have exercised authority and power within the context of their extended families. In the past, the woman in authority would have the charge of the ordinary household utensils and gear. She also controlled the year's food supplies, consisting of flour, dried fruits and vegetables. She was responsible for issuing the daily food for the family's needs. She controlled the family resources and also exercised authority over all other women in the household: daughters, daughters-in-law and sisters-in-law (Lorimer and Muller-Stellretch, 1979). Owing to scanty resources in the past, a competent woman was highly valued and incompetence was fair grounds for divorce. The practice of head woman still exists, but with some modifications; her control over food and its distribution does not need to be as tight, because the region now imports food from the lowlands via the Karakorum Highway.

The economic base is generally subsistence agriculture because of which women's ascribed roles go beyond household chores to include farming and cattle rearing tasks, that is sowing, weeding, carrying manure to the fields, collecting dried leaves, picking fruit, drying fruit, growing vegetables, milking and feeding goats and cows, and keeping the cattle shed clean. Domestic work and working in the fields are regarded as a part of women's roles in the family; the economic value of this unacknowledged invisible work is overlooked (Waring, 1999).

As crop cultivation and animal husbandry no longer suffice as a means of securing a livelihood in the face of the ever-increasing population (at the rate of 2.47 per cent a year), many men and some women take up non-agricultural occupations in order to support their families. This has boosted the gradual transition from subsistence to a cash economy. This transition also bears implications on task divisions between men and women: freeing men from farming work and adding to women's workload as they take up men's work as well. This modernization of occupations has created some dissonance among women by adding a category of "women with paid jobs".

Education, Employment and Women's Lives

In the quest to understand how education has or has not empowered these five women, it is viable to understand what life is like for a common woman in the mountain communities. According to Ibadat

(2002) and Wilson (1999), the role of women presently comprises domestic work like cooking, washing, cleaning, child rearing, collecting fuel wood, water and overall family maintenance. In addition, women are involved in agricultural activities such as cultivation, sowing, weeding, threshing, harvesting, fruit picking and drying, livestock production and management, poultry breeding and rearing of cattle. Beginning with this description, in this section, we examine how women's education and teaching jobs interact with their ascribed familial roles as discussed above. The following excerpt from Fatima's diary explains how a new role associated with women's education has made its way in their ascribed familial routines:

Today I woke up at 6 a.m., prepared breakfast, cleaned the home and arrived at school around 8:30. In school it took me about six periods to make the students write their tests. I marked some there, while some I brought home with me. I arrived home at 2 p.m., prepared and served everybody their food and quickly made dough for fiti (local baked bread). Then I went to convene the Women's Organization's (WO) meeting because I am the manager of this organization. I returned home at about 4 p.m. and found that the kids were not at home. Therefore, I called them and made them sit down to study. Today, I went to [the] fields [family's cultivable land] at 5:30 to do some weeding. Upon my return I prepared the evening meal, read the newspaper and did WO work (documented the details of the meeting, and account status). I made a mental plan for tomorrow and slept.

The interaction between Fatima's domestic responsibilities and the pressure of her commitments as a professional and an educated member of her rural community is discernible here. Fatima enacts her familial ascribed role, which includes household chores and cattle rearing. During the harvest season (summer) these routines get intensified with Fatima (and other women teachers) spending much of their early mornings and afternoons in farming the land. The life histories of these five women explicate the fact that women's education and employment have not changed traditional expectations from them. Instead, education has added to their ascribed role, making life more intensive for them. A discussion here will elaborate on how/ if education helps and empower them to deal with these challenges in patriarchal mountain communities.

Relationships, Reciprocity and Compensatory Farming Work

Owing to their paid jobs, the women teachers had a different pattern of everyday life than other women who lived in traditional households. They found life extremely challenging in extended or joint households, where the other women were extensively involved in farm labour. Though the members of their extended families shared the upbringing of the children and the hardship of cultivating the rocky terrain with them, maintaining relationships within the family was an incessant struggle for the women teachers. All five experienced ebbs and flows in their relationships. They believed they managed this situation through strategies, which they associated with education. For instance, Saira believed that reciprocity was the basic principle of developing a solid, enduring relationship in her extended family. For her and Fatima, their education guided them to live in harmony with their families (extended):

Education is actually learning how to deal with your practical life [after marriage]. OK! Education does not imply collecting some factual information. Instead, it is actually learning to live with other people practically and how to adjust ourselves with other people [in extended families]: the proper adjustment with other people is actually education. (SA. Int.2/04)

Saira was cognizant of her conduct as an educated woman and often attributed her smooth relationships with other members to her skills in adapting to her family's circumstances. She had spent much energy sustaining good relationships with her family members by working in the fields with them after her school hours and taking an equal share in the household chores. Knowing that

reluctance to do the required cooking, washing and farming would upset the other family members, she diligently carried out these chores after a full workday in school. Her family engagements and a peaceful home environment remained her priority over advancing her own teaching career.

The core tension between women teachers and their families derived from how the teachers perceived their traditionally ascribed roles in relation to their status as teachers. Family relationships depended on the women teachers' willingness to participate in household chores. Like Saira, all of the women teachers made extra efforts to compensate for their inability to fulfil farming obligations, mainly to please family members. Sundays, summer vacations and weekday afternoons were used to undertake this compensatory farming work. This work included a whole-day engagement in grass cutting at the family's distant pastures, collecting dry leaves and firewood for winter consumption, sowing potato seeds, reaping it and the wheat harvest. Despite the teachers' monetary contributions, the families still find it difficult to spare these women from farming labour, because each individual's participation lessens the labour and time spent by the others on the tasks. Most of the group farming tasks are scheduled on Sundays, when the women teachers can contribute. These teachers expressed guilt about their inability to take an equal share in the hardships of farming; so they tried to compensate whenever possible. Their main motivation for doing this extra hard work was to improve relationships with their family members.

Compensation also took place in the form of the teachers' directing their salaries to their families' pool of income. In return, the families reciprocated by looking after the teachers' children, preparing and serving afternoon meals and bearing with their frequent absence from household chores and farming. Rabia reported how her pleasant relationship with her in-laws became chilling when she stopped giving her salary to the family's financial pool for a few months. She used the money to repay a loan, which she had obtained to pay for travelling to a city, where she underwent medical treatment for a throat infection. During this period her mother had to intervene when her in-laws complained about her inability to contribute to farming. The family relationship returned to normal when she resumed her salary donations.

The fabric of relationships in the women teachers' families appeared tied by a very delicate thread – enactment of reciprocity by women teachers. They manipulated the days on which their families' intensive farming tasks were to be done to days subject to their availability. They also used their income-earning ability to accommodate their engagements in a profession through compensatory farming work and contribution to the family income pool.

Ascribed Role of Mothering and its Impact on Professional Life

'Educated women with paid jobs' is a relatively new phenomenon for the mountain communities. Therefore, the ways to accommodate such differences do not appear to be properly established as yet by the extended families and communities. While women teachers negotiated the time to perform their share of household and farming chores with their families, their status as educated and professional women resulted in a dilemma to choose between their ascribed familial role and their professional advancement. These women took up paid jobs to earn cash incomes through teaching, to meet family needs. However, their professional needs for further development and the advancement of their careers were not recognized by their extended families. While their commitments to their extended families intensified with the birth of each child, teaching in schools also evolved and became more complex. These teachers who had been taken on with minimal education and no professional training were pressured to improve their professional and educational credentials which remained an uphill task for them because of the pressures exerted by their families and their ascribed role as mothers.

The mountain communities are close-knit, with relationship structures based on clan and blood relations. Hence, enforcing approved gender roles becomes easier. For instance, deviation from

established maternal obligations and practices was noticed. Khadija remembered the pressure she was under by her neighbours when she had just begun teaching. Her neighbours considered Khadija cruel for leaving her infant behind to go to work. They also considered her parents-in-law greedy for allowing Khadija to teach rather than look after her young baby. On the same account, Khadija's husband's act of sharing the infant's care with his wife, also received criticism from neighbours and her mother-in-law, who could not digest the idea of her only son doing "a woman's job".

Though all five women experienced these tensions, Fatima, Saira and Zehra particularly mentioned that the intensity of family affairs governed their professional lives. The non-governmental organization that managed the schools where these five women were teaching offered three of them an opportunity to attend a year-long professional course at a teachers' training college with a fine reputation; they had to refuse because of their family obligations. Saira's and Zehra's families resented the prospect of them taking professional development programmes in the city. Fatima refused any such opportunity in order not to risk her children's education. Generally, all the women were worried about their children's education and moral upbringing. Owing to their socialization in a culture that holds women responsible for the sole upbringing of their children, these women found it hard to reconcile this long-standing view of maternal nurturing as their natural duty with their professional aspirations.

Saira opted for professional development activities based in her hometown, including a degree programme and many short-term courses, especially for language enhancement. When she received an offer to study for a B.Ed. in an eminent educational institution in a city, her family, including her husband rejected it on the grounds that her absence from home for an entire year would disturb her children. She was told to take the children with her if she wished to accept the offer. At another time, Saira could not accept an offer to work in a teacher trainer programme because it required her to travel to remote areas. This resistance further strengthened her maternal obligations and she decided not to take advantage of the professional development prospects at the risk of her children's proper upbringing:

> I think that for children's good upbringing it is necessary that the mother should be with them so I thought our [village] environment is bad, there was no use my going here and there leaving them behind; I would ruin them for the sake of my studies. (Saira, April 5, 2002)

Saira's emphasis on the good upbringing of her children included monitoring their academic performances besides the general nurturing practices. The family had particularly avoided taking any responsibility for her children (three boys, aged 15, 9 and 7). Saira's daily routines not only kept her engaged in cooking and washing for her family, she consistently monitored and assisted her children in their schoolwork. She reported in her diary that she helped her son with one lesson at midnight, after doing the laundry, while her husband was already asleep.

Like Saira, Fatima took on greater responsibility for her children's upbringing and education and found fulfilment in her children's success. In the past, she had experienced tensions between her extended family life and professional aspirations, so she moved to establish her own nuclear family. However, her professional aspirations were now constrained in different ways as she preferred her children's education over her own professional development:

> Actually, my husband is a little careless with the children. Hence, the children could have suffered if I had gone out for two years. Two years ago, our education officer asked me if I could go to Lahore [a city in Pakistan] to study for a B.Ed. programme, but I could not go. My husband also told me, "You go." I said, "All right, I will go; but the poor kids, who will give them time? They've got to study." (FT. Int. 3/15)

The spouses' different gender roles were quite discernible in their everyday interaction with their children. Most obviously, teachers' husbands took little if any part in the process of caring for and rearing their children. Despite being reasonably educated, they did not even help the children in their studies. For example, Fatima, during her engagement in household chores, persuaded her children to study and prepare for their examinations while her husband was enjoying music after lunch. Fatima and Saira's compromises led them to enjoy a contented life with their children's academic achievements. Zehra, however, still regretted her inability to avail herself of professional development opportunities to become "an able teacher". Besides, observing other mothers who devotedly attended to their children's needs also created dissonance for Zehra and makes her feel guilty for ignoring her ascribed familial role.

Rabia and Khadija were able to negotiate with their own maternal obligations to fulfil their professional aspirations. As a head teacher of a primary school, Rabia stayed longer hours in the school. She had just given birth to her second son and she was prepared to take on the challenge to head a school. She negotiated with a relative living in her neighbourhood to breastfeed the infant in her absence. Among the five teachers, Khadija was able to take one year off to pursue professional training in a city. She reported that the family deliberated intensely on the issue of Khadija leaving them for a year to get professional training before they released her.

The size of indigenous families was a major factor behind these teachers' ability or inability to negotiate their professional career. For instance, Rabia's and Khadija's families were smaller (10 and nine members respectively) than Zehra's and Saira's families (14 members each). The formation of these families was yet another factor that contributed towards the tension between teachers' familial ascribed roles and their careers. As Rabia's husband was the eldest and only married son, she was the only daughter-in-law of the family. Similarly, by virtue of Khadija's husband being the only child, she was also the only daughter-in-law. Fewer members (particularly elders) in the family meant less and more negotiable resistance. While in Zehra's and Saira's case, besides parents-in-law, both had the families of their husbands' married brothers living with them. This intensified these women teachers' challenges as there were more members in the family to monitor whether the women teachers shared household and farming chores or not. Fatima, who finally established her nuclear household, faced similar challenges when she lived with her large extended family. According to her account, during the initial years of her teaching, her family strictly monitored her ability to fulfil her ascribed role. One day, while she was busy doing an assignment for her Distant Learning Course, nobody milked the family cow because this task was assigned to her. She could do it only at midnight after finishing her work. For her and other teachers who live in larger extended families, education only intensifies their lives.

The period in the women teachers' lives also appears important in deciding whether they could leave their families to join a professional development programme. For instance, when Khadija decided (or was allowed) to leave her family for the one-year programme of study, her children were no longer so young as to create a major childcare problem. So the family allowed her to attend this course, having considered alternative arrangements to offset her absence from household and farming tasks. For example, Khadija's mother-in-law brought her unmarried grown-up niece in to help her with everyday household chores, farming tasks and cattle rearing. Hence the family could manage the daily routines in her absence, though with difficulty.

Changing Dimensions of Headwomen

While women faced tensions between their familial ascribed roles and professional aspirations, their status as educated women seemed to have added a new dimension to the role of head women. In past and present families with indigenous structures head women exercised authority within households by looking after food supplies and family routines (household chores, farming and cattle rearing

tasks) While, corresponding to patriarchal norms, men headed the families and made all decisions. The life histories of these five women, however, indicate that they were least concerned about controlling family routines and were more inclined to exercise their increased control over decision-making about their children's future. Fatima, Zehra, Khadija and Saira not only supervised their children's homework and academic performance, they also decided the schools their children should attend. Sometimes, Khadija and Zehra felt envious of mothers who did not have to go out every day to work and thus had time to address their families' needs. At the same time, they also acknowledged their own thoughtfulness towards their children's future; they possessed a positive self-image as educated mothers. Fatima, being the first woman of her family to complete her matriculation, took pride in her eldest daughter following her footsteps by becoming the first girl with a Master's degree. With Fatima's daughter gainfully employed, the family next pinned their hopes on the younger children's performance in school.

Khadija, with her aspirations for professional fulfilment, took charge of planning for her children's education. She decided to send her eldest son to a city for high school, because his progress in the local government school was not satisfactory. She had the same plans for her third son. Her second son was studying in the local government school, but did not perform well. Khadija reported paying frequent visits to his school, to keep in touch with his progress, and help him in his studies at home. Zehra and Saira also moved their children to different schools, wishing to provide them with better education. Contrary to the scope of head women's authority, women teachers were using their autonomy and control to direct the future course of their children's lives. This dimension in women's lives also requires reflection as to whether they were mediating and modifying the concept of patriarchy in the context of their families and immediate communities.

Reshaping Traditional Task Divisions

An overview of women's home environment will, here, explain the extent education has empowered them to influence the traditional gender relations within women's immediate families. During the visits to the participants' homes, a traditional home environment was observed. Saira, Khadija and Fatima all served their husbands' meals in the traditional manner. The men sat down, and the women or children [in Khadija's case] brought food to them. The women also removed the dishes once the men finished eating. Occasionally, the women brought a basin for the men to wash their hands before having a meal. Some rare instances of attempts to change traditional practices regarding the division of positions and tasks between men and women were also observed. For example, Fatima's husband helped her bake bread. While she was making flatbread with the rolling pin, he baked it on the stove. He also checked whether the curry was ready. Later, Fatima's older son [a Grade X student] upon his return from school, warmed up a meal and served himself. Fatima proudly mentioned her husband's supportive attitude. He helped her carry out tasks such as preparing breakfast and cattle rearing; occasionally, he ironed his clothes. She believed that her husband's non-traditional attitude made it possible for her to be engaged in other activities. In her busy schedule, she could not spare too much of time for her children, yet she concerned herself with their proper upbringing. They, in turn, knew the value of time in their mother's life. Therefore, they contributed to the smooth running of the household:

> Actually, I have taught them to do their homework on their own ... the older ones help the younger ones ... and they do it by themselves ... my son begins cleaning the place ... I have not taught them [meaning her sons] to gallivant around, visiting their uncles and aunts or visit other relatives, wasting their time. If they did this, obviously, mother has a problem! The father does not feel that much. It is only mother who suffers more. (FT. Int. 3/12-13)

In the context of the strong division between men's and women's positions, assistance from Fatima's husband and son did not occur suddenly. Rather, it resulted from Fatima's constant interventions.

She recalled that at the initial stages of her teaching career, Fatima asked her husband to wash her baby daughter's face because she was engaged in some work just before leaving for school. Upon hearing this, her mother-in-law rebuffed Fatima, saying, "What kind of woman are you? You are telling my son to wash your daughter's face. Next you will ask him to sweep the floor." [The most "humiliating" job for men.] (FA.Int.3/09). Though Fatima could not directly confront her mother-in-law, she nevertheless continued to involve her husband in the baby's care.

Once Fatima established her nuclear household, her children understood that their mother had working patterns different from the other women in their family or neighbouring families. This meant that by reviewing centuries-old task divisions, the family was coming to terms with Fatima's various obligations and her changed role. In contrast to the traditional family set-up governed by the father, Fatima played a crucial role in disciplining her children and establishing their routines, aiming for better performance from them in school. She constantly reminded herself that problems in the children's upbringing would affect her more as a mother, than they would her husband. More importantly, she believed that contrary to the concept of a traditional woman, as an educated mother, she was making a substantial contribution to her children's education and future plans.

Khadija also attributed her ability to accomplish different commitments to her husband's considerate attitude. Initially, Khadija's mother-in-law found it quite unacceptable that her only son did women's work, such as feeding and caring for their infants. Khadija's husband doing women's work remained a matter of interest for the neighbours:

People say that he [her husband] does everything. I tell him, "Who should do it then?" I also do my job [teaching, a paid job] and he also does [teaching in a local school]. We never think in this manner, we always work together. A neighbour of mine has a husband who is retired, an army man. He may not help her, and she tells me, "See, Kako [brother, meaning Khadija's husband] does so much work for you. He does everything." (KH.Int.3/29)

There is an assumption on the part of people talking about Khadija's husband "doing everything", that men are the superior sex and should not perform tasks considered of a low level because these are usually done by women. Khadija justified her husband's participation in the household because she, like him, worked in a paid job, and hence was doing a "man's job" as a provider. Her ability to rationalize the changing gender relations within her family's context is a strong attribution to her confidence that she derived from her education and ability to earn cash income. She did not give in to the negative pressure within her family and from the community, instead she persistently followed the route towards gaining more autonomy.

Zehra found it challenging to handle the household and other responsibilities while tending to her young baby. Her husband eased the pressure on her by ironing his clothes and polishing his own shoes, which Zehra construed as her tasks. Zehra repeated the phrase "my work", which implied farming, cattle rearing, household chores and looking after the children and other family members. She believed women, like herself, got more respect if they were educated, because her husband was prepared to help her. She nevertheless faced strong resistance from her elderly mother-in-law who did not approve of her son's helping his wife and thus attempting to change traditional values.

The family size and structure consistently proved a major factor in determining the success and failure of these women's attempts to modify family routines and make slight changes in the traditional gender relations. Saira said:

The majority of people, here, live in extended families. If there were nuclear families, such problems would be rare. I mean, men could help their women to an extent which is not possible in a combined [extended] family system ... men in combined families do not like to help us in the presence of other family members. (SA. Int. 4/11)

She felt that the extended family strictly monitored the enactment of traditional gender roles; a wife doing feminine work and husband behaving as a "man". Saira reported an argument with her husband who could not respond to her positively when she asked him to make the bed for their children while she was busy with post-dinner kitchen chores. Men who help their wives by feeding the children or putting them to bed are looked down upon by other members in the family for not being able to maintain the image of masculinity.

In resisting the ascribed boundaries for the work of men and women, the women teachers seemed to be redefining their own images and the related expectations. Some fought tradition by involving and encouraging their husbands in so-called "female work"; others were still debating as to what was acceptable or unacceptable in the context of their families in their changing circumstances. The process of challenging values deeply instilled in men and women from childhood intensifies further because the extended family and close-knit local community strictly monitor the practice and transmission of these patriarchal values. Extended families exert pressure on men to maintain their image of supremacy and difference as men by not engaging in women's work. For example, Saira believed that her husband's avoidance in assisting her in childcare was rooted in the pressure exerted by his extended family.

In contrast, the flexibility of Fatima's family in dealing with daily household chores was derived from her maintaining a nuclear household. Thus, she had some autonomy to establish a different pattern of relationship that suited her engagements in teaching and community development. Fatima did face pressure to fulfil various traditional commitments, but this pressure was less intense than that on the women who lived in extended or joint families. Similarly, a comparatively smaller joint family facilitated Khadija's attempts to involve her husband in daily household chores. Her mother-in-law's unstable health provided Khadija's husband with a strong reason to support Khadija in fulfilling her various commitments.

Social Mobility

The absence of a public transportation system and the hard geographical terrain pose a challenge for the residents' swift mobility. For women, this challenge further intensifies because of the stigma attached to women walking alone. The data suggests that women teachers attempted to break this stigma to fulfil their professional commitments. Rabia was appointed as the head teacher at a primary school located in the neighbouring village. The walk to and from school was about an hour long, on a steep, rocky dirt road, which at some places was quite deserted. Besides this geographical hardship, the social stigma attached to "a woman walking alone" was a major concern for Rabia and her family. Initially, Rabia's father-in-law (owing to her husband's prolonged absence) accompanied her, but this was not really feasible, and Rabia decided to walk alone. She described this experience in one of the interviews:

> Initially, I felt scared walking alone. There are many traders from other cities during the potato-harvesting season. Some of them are just very unreasonable. While we [women] are walking on the road, they reduce the speed of their vehicle just enough to make us feel that it is coming to a halt as it approaches us. I used to walk at the edge of the road, thinking if something happens [they try to get her in the vehicle] I would jump down from the road into the terraced fields or to the bottom of the gardens. I was really very fearful then. Then I tried and got Sara [another teacher from her village] for my school. So I got her company. We walk back and forth together. Now there is no problem. Even if I have to walk alone, I don't have any fears [smiling]. I can kill someone if they try to harm me. On my way home, there is a particular deserted place with many trees. Previously, I was frightened of that place and would almost run as I reached there. But now I have no fears; on the contrary, I walk confidently with personal pride. (RB.Int.5/24)

A discussion with her about the changes in terms of overcoming the personal fear of strange men and developing confidence in herself, confirmed its roots in her being educated. As many women continue to conform to the dominant image of women's dependency, model teachers like Rabia are in the process of manipulating these relationships. She distinguished herself as a teacher and appropriated the "inappropriate" behaviour of "walking alone" on a public space such as the roadside.

Despite women teachers' willingness to shed this dependency model for social mobility there were occasions when they displayed conformity to the dominant model for the sake of approval. Occasionally, as the head teacher Rabia had to travel to her organization's Field Education Office located three villages away. Most of the time, she travelled alone to the office (half an hour's travel in a minivan). At times, her uncle, who owned a shop at the main road in her school village, stopped the public minivan for her when he saw her waiting for it. Both were aware that Rabia travelled independently, yet they enacted this social behaviour for the approval of the broader society and out of respect for personal relationships. Rabia's act of waving to a minivan to stop in the presence of her uncle, would have received immense disapproval from the onlookers. Nevertheless, Rabia never let this conformity to patriarchy govern her social movements. To enjoy the freedom of social mobility, Fatima enacted traditional gender relationships when required:

> *My husband had a job in another village … he would not bother about it anyway … sometimes when the children got sick I had to take them to the hospital … at the roundabout in the busy place I had to wait for a long time for the rarely available minivan. Often neighbours or relatives (men) would see me and ask why I was standing there alone in the middle of a bazaar and where was my husband … mostly I would tell them that my husband had just gone to a shop nearby for a quick purchase and would be back soon. (FT. Int.5/05)*

These examples identify the social pressures that women confront in their pursuit of transforming traditional gendered roles and images. Here, women's "bargaining with patriarchy" (Kandiyoti, 1997) or the parallel strategies of conforming and resisting dominant patriarchal control (Ashraf, 2004) are also explicit. To meet their personal and professional needs, they successfully employed these strategies, which boosted their confidence as educated women.

These two accounts also entail the women's enhanced ability to resist societal pressure that previously governed their lives. For instance, their discontinuation of education was due to community pressure, which disapproved of adolescent girls going to school instead of getting married. Zehra's access to a college for further education was particularly hindered because her close relatives considered its environment inappropriate for grownup girls. For instance, two of these women were denied better marriage prospects outside their clans and were pushed into forced marriages within their natal families. The intention was to allow their own families to benefit from these women's economic gains.

Similarly, their families also generally directed the women's choices of profession. The women teachers' attempts to take up jobs in an organization that offered better monetary incentives were rejected by their immediate families and communities because it required them to travel away from their families and interact with men not related to them. Teaching remained the approved job because of its ability to harmonize with women's familial ascribed roles. Interestingly, a recently graduated daughter of one of these teachers (who was once constrained to switch jobs), took up a job in the same organization and was actually engaged in frequent travelling and job-related interactions with the wider community. The mother of this girl informed us that in the past her parents and she herself lacked the ability to resist pressure from the community. Hence she could not accept a job in the same organization when she was offered one, whereas her daughter was now working there. As an educated

mother, this teacher fully supported her daughter's decision and patiently resisted pressure from neighbours who inquired about her absence and job-related regular travels to various parts of the country.

Education and Women's Empowerment

The life histories of these five women teachers do affirm that education added another dimension to women's traditionally ascribed roles. They were not only fulfilling their ascribed familial role (household, family care, farming and cattle rearing), but these women were also earning cash income like the male members of their families. Their cash income earning ability did not change traditional expectations from them because social and family structures with associated norms and family traditions remained consonant. This situation intensified women teachers' lives. They were constantly engaged in negotiating their different needs with their extended families through the strategy of reciprocity in the form of compensatory work and contributing to the family's income pool.

Women teachers were also engaged in negotiating their position as educated women in the patriarchal mountain communities. They attempted to reshape traditional task division by engaging their male offspring and husbands in traditionally feminine tasks. It gave them confidence and ability to negotiate their position in society. Similarly, they appropriated the inappropriate tasks of "women walking alone in public" which Kandiyoti (1982) calls "bargaining with patriarchy". This bargaining with patriarchy affirms Kabeer's (1999) assertion that empowerment cannot be reduced to a single aspect of process or outcome. How women exercise choices and the actual outcomes depend on the individuals. Choices will vary across class, time and space. Women's access to education and employment exhibit the transitions and modifications in their position in the mountain communities. Though, gender relationships are being examined in the light of the current changes in these communities, resistance to any revision or modification of women's position is still discernible. Women teachers' struggle to improve their positions by modifying their roles in their families is, in essence, an effort to resist society's patriarchal norms that control relationships between men and women.

As discussed earlier, time and space for women in indigenous mountain communities are of great significance. Therefore, they need some reflection in order to examine how education empowered women to influence gender relationships. For instance, Fatima's and Khadija's apparently successful modification in gendered task division in the family did not happen during their initial years of teaching and marriage. Any attempt to involve their husbands in childcare or household chores faced resistance from their mothers-in-law. Only at a certain age (in Fatima's case establishing a nuclear household), these women were able to modify gendered task division. With their age, experience and number of offspring, Khadija and Fatima appeared to assume the role of the head woman, which allowed them certain authority and control over household affairs, meaning strategies to perform household chores. As educated head women, their decision-making sphere went beyond ordinary household matters. The decisions teachers made were exclusively about their children's education, while they gave in for their professional aspirations because of pressure exerted from their extended families and immediate communities. With changing time, these women also developed the ability to withstand the pressures of the wider community. For instance, Fatima was able to choose a profession for her daughter, which she was once prohibited to pursue because her extended family and community then considered it inappropriate.

A reflection on the relationship between education and women's empowerment in the context of these five women's life histories requires an understanding of how empowerment was defined earlier in this paper. Keeping in view the embeddedness of "power" within the concept of empowerment, Batliwala (1994) defines empowerment as a redistribution of power whether between nations, classes, castes, genders, or individuals. Women were actually engaged in gaining more decision-making capacity within their families, and a deepening of an understanding of the gender relations that

were affecting their lives. Walters and Manicom (1996) consider these two processes as dimensions of empowerment. The women teachers' acts of continued affiliation with their paid job, constant negotiations with their families to accommodate their individual and different circumstances, and taking over the matters of their children's education appeared to establish their individual identity as educated women in patriarchal communities. The women were neither able to demonstrate complete autonomy nor were they able to gain control over the conditions (patriarchy) that had always governed their lives. Their education, nevertheless, did enable them to be persistent in challenging gender division of labour within their families.

Transforming the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination as the goal of women's empowerment (Batliwala, 1994; Patel, 1996) through education will remain a distant dream because these women with their education are tiny factors in the formation and structuring of a patriarchal society. Owing to everyday constraints they faced in fulfilling the requirements of their paid jobs, they changed certain practices of not travelling unaccompanied (e.g. walking alone to their workplace or going to the doctor). Out of necessity, in the same circumstances, they tried to involve their husbands and male offspring in doing "women's work". They began questioning patriarchal ideology as a result of their daily confrontations caused by having different working patterns from other local women. In the same way, family structures also gradually became flexible to accommodate women whose paid jobs were of greater benefit to their families.

Indigenous family systems complicated matters for these women by monitoring strict adherence to prevailing gender relationships. The positive examples of Khadija's and Fatima's attempts to redefine gender relationships were not present in the experiences of Saira and Zehra. Unlike Khadija, and Fatima, they had to conform to the traditional gender structure and strict observance of gendered task divisions. After reviewing the life histories of these five women teachers, the term 'empowerment' seems an ideal state of being. There is a strong relationship between these five teachers' lives and the broader social and cultural context of the region. Without an attempt to unpack and analyse ideas taken for granted about women in specific material, historical, and cultural contexts (Olesen, 2000), striving towards the goal of women's empowerment through education would be equal to ignoring the various other dimensions of women's lives. The data suggest that women teachers, despite their reasonable education and gainful employment could not have the empowerment to fully control their lives.

Robinson-Pant (2004) states that it has become common-sense knowledge that education can be a pathway to better jobs and hence a better life. That is, the more education you have, the better your chances in life would be. Similar ideas about education do prevail in the northern areas. The monetary outcomes of women's education could be one explanation for the flexibility shown by the families of women teachers. This attitude, if true, falls in the modernization paradigm of development where education and literacy are considered tools to improve and increase women's efficiency in their existing roles for the benefit of the economy, rather than for education to transform gender relations or lead to greater gender equity (Robinson-Pant, 2004).

In the past, women contributed to agriculture, which was the family's subsistence economy. Now with education, women are doing the same job efficiently. Their salaries directly went to their families' income pools, while they received pocket money for their immediate needs. As a matter of fact, men in the family handled their bank accounts. The education that these women received enabled them to secure employment and contribute to the family's economy. Thus, the life histories of these women teachers and our general observations of women's status in the region, affirm that education with a paid job can create conditions for women to take some control over their lives.

To achieve the desired link between education and women's empowerment, the nature of education these women received also needs some scrutiny. Questioning gendered task divisions, in the context

of these five women's life histories, appeared to be rooted in the tensions they faced resulting from the addition of a new role to their traditionally ascribed role. The education system they attended in the region fosters rote-learning and fact-memorization without developing the skills of critical thinking in students. Also dominant gender issues are not integrated in the curriculum, which rarely gets revised. To claim a relationship between education and women's empowerment will remain a dream, unless the education system is transformed for greater awareness, and the transformation of patriarchal communities into a more female-friendly societal system takes place. This can lead to a greater balance of household responsibilities such as childcare and domestic work, which can in return foster equity and provide more time for professional pursuits such as teaching (Stacki and Pigozzi, 1995). The interrelationship between the women teachers' various domains of activities (i.e. familial, professional and communal) is a vital category of analysis for the development stakeholders.

The life histories of these women teachers have implications not only for theorizing women's lives by recognizing their diverse experiences across the wide cultural, geographical and ideological spaces. Examples from these help us reconceptualize the discourse of development to inform us that using women as a "singular category of analysis" (Mohanty, 2003) can endanger the discourse about women's lives. To understand whether or not education leads to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability, the development discourse needs to see the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms and the dynamics of power relations between men and women (Personal Narrative Group, 1989).

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Towards the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls: Some Micro-Initiatives from Rural India

Namita Ranganathan

This paper seeks to analyse the policy initiatives on women's education and empowerment, especially in the light of the preponderant social, cultural and geographical diversities that exist in India. It argues that the approach to defining women's welfare and development as enshrined in the Indian Constitution is somewhat utopian in nature and can only be a starting point to promote women's well-being. Real success can be achieved only when welfare and development are conceptualized and defined operationally, taking into cognizance the prevalent social and cultural realities of the region where they are being pursued. Three such micro initiatives where this was done with a fair amount of success are described in this paper. CARE, an international non-governmental organization, undertook two of these in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat in collaboration with local NGOs and the third was an initiative in Rajasthan by SARD, a large national non-governmental organization. All three initiatives were located in remote rural areas declared educationally backward. They targeted the common role of facilitating the empowerment of adolescent girls through the process of education.

The work and achievements of these organizations as will be subsequently described, demonstrates that in a country like India, fraught with diversity and variations across caste, class, region, ethnicity, etc., there is a need to define concepts like equality, equity and empowerment from a contextually embedded understanding of what they actually mean and imply. It is also important to recognize that these notions are central to the process of education. The reason for focusing on these initiatives is that they adapted creative strategies to achieve their goals and were able to make a qualitative difference to girls' lives. Their work can thus serve to provide rich insights for future policy formulations. Furthermore, although they were carried out in micro-contexts, their approach, assumptions, methodology and strategies can also possibly enable the State to rethink some dimensions on its own approach to women's welfare and development. In this paper I thus wish to discuss at length, the lessons learned from these initiatives both from a theoretical standpoint and from their practical relevance.

Despite women's education, welfare and development occupying frontal emphasis in national goals and policies since Indian independence in 1947, today, 60 years later, it is seen that there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of girls and women in India, on the other. Universalization of elementary education is still to be achieved; retaining girls in schools in rural areas beyond the primary stage continues to be a challenge; and enabling girls and women to lead lives of dignity and freedom still remains a distant goal. Probably making commitments alone does not ensure results. The dynamics of the process have to be understood. In the educationally backward states in particular, the context-specific nuances have to be analysed. It is only then that the strategies and methodology can have meaning.

The work of the three micro initiatives, which will now be described in detail has been very successful in this regard. The special features and dynamics of the characteristics, strategies and processes

adopted by them, were able to address gender equity and empowerment with reasonable success. Each initiative has to be studied and understood however, in the unique context in which it existed. The Udaan initiative for instance, addressed out-of-school adolescent girls in the age group of 10-15 years through an intensive residential programme of a year's duration. The initiative in Kutch focused on adolescent girls through setting up learning centres in the villages where they lived. The initiative undertaken by SARD addressed adolescent girls but in the setting of a minority community. Each of them dealt with the issues of equity and empowerment, evolving their own strategies. A detailed description and analysis of their work is presented in the next section.

The paper is organized in two sections. The first section presents detailed descriptions of the background, contexts, methodology, goals and achievements of the three initiatives, which the paper wishes to highlight. The second section focuses on the lessons learned from the work done by them.

The Micro Initiatives

Udaan

The residential camp 'Udaan', meaning 'flight', is a part of CARE India's efforts for the education of girls from marginalized groups. CARE's partner NGO, Sarvodaya Ashram is currently running the camp in Hardoi, which is an educationally backward[1] district of Uttar Pradesh, especially in the context of girls' education. The camp provides learning opportunities to out-of-school girls each year. The girls are in the age group of 11-15 years who either dropped out, or never went to school. With Udaan, they get an opportunity to break the vicious cycle of illiteracy and complete Class V primary education in a year. In addition, they are equipped with social education which helps them to build an independent personality with critical capacities to decide, discern and intervene meaningfully in the situations of constraint that surround them. These situations of constraint include living in a patriarchal set-up, being socialized into traditional feminine gender roles, becoming victims of early marriages and motherhood, leading lives characterized by social restrictions and taboos, and living in a society which undervalues girls and reinforces a culture of obedience and compliance to existing social norms and standards among them.

The specific objectives of the programme at Udaan sought to:

- Break the social and psychological barriers which made the community believe that education is unimportant and irrelevant.

- Provide a competent system of education in one year equivalent to primary education.

- Develop independent and critical thinking abilities, analytical skills and a spirit of inquiry in the girls.

- Equip them with relevant information, skills and attitudes that would enable them to deal with the world from a position of strength, and

- Provide a joyful learning environment, enhance their interest in continuing further education and develop in them a sense of personal capability and self-esteem.

Source: *Social Learning in Elementary Education: A Reference Manual*, CARE India (2004).

The educational experience at Udaan consists of 75-100 girls living together in a community for a period of one year. Every moment that they spend together is carefully used to build up their cognitive, social and personality-related skills, attitudes and abilities. The structured curriculum follows a

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[1] Here educationally backward implies very poor provision of schooling facilities by the State, low enrolment, high dropout rates, low rate of literacy and inadequate importance given to the education of girls.

compacted sequential approach, weaving in five levels or phases of formal learning of: language, mathematics and environmental science. These correspond with the standards of formal schooling from Class I-V, at the end of which the girls appear for the Uttar Pradesh State Board Examination of Class V, as a certification of completion of primary education. The teaching methodology is activity-based and interactive. Academic learning is interspersed with a host of co-curricular activities representing games and sports, and cultural and literary dimensions, all of which target the development of self-esteem and a sense of identity among the girls within the larger objective of their empowerment.

A special feature of Udaan is the Social Learning Curriculum[2] through which the girls are sensitized towards personal and social issues of concern to them, their families and their village communities. It builds awareness in them and kindles a sense of hope and optimism towards social change. This curriculum was designed with the aim of developing girls into self-confident individuals, who could think critically and visualize their own potential in the social context in which they live. A conscious decision was taken not to have an information overload. Instead the emphasis is on an exploration of self and society through dialogue, role plays, games, stories and projects. The curriculum was conceived and developed around the concept of 'relationships'. The self of the learner was placed at the centre of several concentric circles that represent family and community, the larger society, institutions, ecology and the economy. Themes in this curriculum explore the relationship of self to itself and to all other entities represented by the concentric circles. It also deals with the interrelationships between these entities. (*Social Learning in Elementary Education: A Reference Manual*, CARE India 2004).

An attitude of community togetherness and the importance of a strong civic sense and social responsibility are also developed through different institutional mechanisms set up in Udaan to enable the girls to have rich experiences in these domains.

Some of the key features that distinguish the Udaan curriculum include:

- A perspective on equity and social change within which the curriculum is located

- An effort to provide a holistic education rather than academic education alone; thus aspects such as social learning and thinking skills are also included

- A well worked out approach to each subject

- An activity-oriented pedagogy that involves projects and learning guides in later classes, promotes self-learning and self-assessment

- Use of a diverse range of materials without dependence on a textbook.

When the curriculum of Udaan was conceptualized and developed, the prevailing iniquitous beliefs that essentially deprive girls of genuine and equal participation in education were identified and studied. To some extent, Udaan tried to create conditions that would resist these beliefs and question the assumptions that lead to the educational exclusion of girls. The physical, social, economic and psychological barriers emanating from the belief system of the community were thus taken into cognizance before designing the approach in order that the barriers did not stand in the way of providing effective education to the girls. These were replaced by a new set of assumptions, which reposed faith in girls' agency and abilities as follows:

- Udaan asserts and functions on the basis of the assumption that all can learn. No one is allowed to assume that someone is not fit for learning. From day one itself therefore,

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[2] The specific themes include health, nutrition, sexuality, girls' legal rights, family legacy and property, elections, democracy, civic bodies and Panchayati Raj institutions, division of labour, perspectives on dowry, marriage, family size and girls' education.

Udaan organizers and teachers seek to communicate to the girls their faith in the latter's ability to learn.

- Udaan education seeks to help each girl achieve her potential and develop a perceptive understanding of the world in which she lives and her role in it.

- A consciously designed routine and living pattern in the camp seeks to do away with the caste stereotypes and biases that prevail in society. For instance, everyone takes turns to clean the toilets or serve food. The issue is discussed with adult community members as well, resulting in many of them changing their stances. Several regressive social beliefs and practices are thus replaced by more progressive ones and a better sense of community.

- The curriculum respects the native language of the children. "Standard language" is seen as a subjective socio-politically defined version and is introduced only towards Class III. The girls are encouraged to use their local dialect, even in writing. As a consequence effective and natural expression results; feelings of one's culture being "backward" do not arise; and the originality and creativity of the girls' language expression are preserved.

- The curriculum and pedagogy take into account the strengths of an oral culture and introduce the literate mode without damaging this inheritance.

- Udaan values each student as a person, as a girl and as a learner. The warmth and affection received by them in the camp and the potential that they are helped to uncover, convince them and their parents that education is essential for all.

- Some methods are consciously designed to make things difficult for the girls so that they can realize their own active roles as learners in terms of thinking for themselves, in exploring, struggling to find solutions and in expressing themselves. The use of self-learning and self-assessment devices furthers this active role.

- The curriculum emphasizes going beyond the mechanical aspects (example correct spelling or handwriting) into more reflective and creative ones. Girls express themselves through a large range of creative means, from writing and drawing to drama, composing poetry, writing stories, creating newsletters, making clay models, collages, etc.

- The belief in Udaan is that not everyone is expected to learn the same thing in the same time through the same methods and materials. Comparisons between girls are thus never made and the classroom attempts to function as an equitable space wherein equity implies "to each according to her need".

Source: Subir, Shukla, *Curriculum Document on Udaan* (2002).

One of the main aims of Udaan education, as stated earlier is to empower or equip and enable girls to aspire for more equitable lives. Thus "gender" which is the main source of inequity in the girls' lives becomes a very significant dimension of the entire curriculum and education programme. Efforts are made to "empower" girls through developing life skills and attitudes, which transcend the boundaries of traditional gender beliefs and practices. Thus, during the one year that they spend there, the girls are trained to question, analyse, reflect upon and rethink some of the traditional and stereotypical gender-related practices, prevalent in the villages. They are also shown the possibilities for social change and their own role in this regard. It is almost like a process of "re-socialization" which they are exposed to. As a result of this, they begin to understand the fact that they can have better control over their own lives through exercising their own personal agency. A number of strategies are used to achieve this.

- **Building up the ability to discriminate in the girls** : Through this the girls are made to understand that while equity implies fairness, justice or even-handedness, it is equally important to recognize that it does not imply "sameness". The attempt is to enable them to conceptualize equity as "each one according to his or her needs" rather than "the same to each". A respect for diversity is thus created. They are also encouraged to recognize where a practice, however deeply ingrained in daily life and therefore seemingly "natural" can actually be unjust or iniquitous. In addition, they are sensitized to the notion of their rights and the areas where they are applicable and can be demanded. These dimensions help students to develop the ability to discriminate or perceive their own life situations with greater sensitivity and awareness.

- **Building a better informed world view among the girls** : Udaan focuses not only on learning about facts and facets of the observable environment and the world beyond, but also on understanding the interrelationships that operate across these various elements. The girls are oriented not only to observe the physical and social environment but also to probe what lies behind the visible phenomena. In terms of the subjects they learn, the effort is to emphasize linkages across them, as well as the social learning component. It is believed that such an approach is crucial both in terms of discovering the meaning of one's world and finding a just place for oneself in it.

- **Placing emphasis on higher order abilities** : A concerted effort is made in Udaan to develop reflection, imagination, application, a perception of interrelationships and an exposure to a range of mental processes in the girls, in the hope that these bring out the best that the girls were capable of.

- **Facilitating autonomy to the extent possible** : The pedagogy used lays great stress on processes where the girls are actively engaged. The use of activities as staple learning experiences, of projects that lead to discovery and creation, the promotion of self-learning and self-evaluation, all provide the girls with the opportunity to think for themselves, take a number of decisions and share their positions or defend their conclusions. The belief is that with this kind of training the girls are better placed in their real life situations to seek a more just life for themselves.

- **Individualizing learning within a common framework** : In Udaan the need to complete five grades in one year results in a situation where the whole class is required to move at more or less the same pace. Despite this an effort was made not to be norm-driven. The variety of material provided and a non-threatening relationship with the teachers has helped the girls to develop confidence in themselves and a sense of faith in their personal abilities .These then become the baseline for empowerment in social situations as well.

- **Inculcating negotiation skills** : This is done through the Social Learning Curriculum and a special sub-course on Thinking Skills which is designed to equip the girls with the ability to think critically, to be creative, to learn further on their own and to be self-critical too. It is expected that this will help them to cope with real life situations when they return to their families and communities and examine the inequities that characterize these.

- **Experiencing success aimed at building a better self-image** : The key strategy used is that of creating conditions where the girls can experience success with the capabilities they have and then gradually increase the level of difficulty to obtain success. This results in combating the fear of failure and promotes a willingness to make an effort.

- **Generating rigour, industry and a problem-solving approach** : Udaan has generated in its girls an ability to go beyond superficialities, to probe and question, to apply rigour to

whatever they take on and use a problem-solving approach. This equips them in many ways for what lies ahead in their future lives.

- **Engendering meaningful attitudes** : This refers to developing a set of constructive life attitudes, which would have a lasting value. The basis is the analysis of one's own experiences and identifying how one envisages one's future. This enables girls to shed their biases, redefine their relationships and understand the importance of their own life experiences. It helps to open up their minds.

- **Providing them opportunity for expression** : Considerable emphasis is given to provide the girls with a wide range of opportunities to express themselves in all the curricular areas. The expression in itself is not in terms of giving expected answers, but involves looking inwards and then sharing what they want to express in various forms. This gives the girls the feeling that they are actually using what they are learning, to express themselves, to say their own thing and to improve themselves.

All these experiences and opportunities lead to the development of a better sense of self and to growth as persons in the girls. A holistic analysis of the objectives of education at Udaan, the curriculum set up for the purpose and the strategies used for its implementation show that the obvious quest was the psychosocial empowerment of the girls. This was done by enabling them to lead more enlightened lives, make informed choices, develop a sense of personal agency, control over their own lives, understand the larger issues and implications of gender equity and diversity and become agents of social change.

A recent research study (Ranganathan and Jaimini, 2005) found that Udaan has succeeded in meeting a number of its objectives and promoting psychosocial empowerment in various ways. This study compared the girls educated at Udaan since its inception in 2000 with their non-schooled age-mates and girls undergoing formal schooling, all from the same villages on the following dimensions:

- Their sense of self and personal identity, represented through the determinants of their identity, their identification of strengths and weaknesses, their personal and vocational goals, their role models and their projections of their self, village identity, psychological world and dreams. This was done through both verbal and non-verbal methods, in the form of drawings.

- Their construction of gender identity reflected through the gender stereotypes and gender roles that they uphold, their perceptions and attitudes towards initiating gender-specific social change, envisaging of their own role in mediating gender-related changes and their vision on gender projections for the future. These were studied through checklists, situational analysis, role play depictions and open-ended questionnaires.

The findings specifically showed that:

- The girls educated at Udaan had a more holistic sense of self and identity than their non-schooled and formal school counterparts.

- They defined their identities more expansively and used many more determinants and factors to describe them.

- They could combine societal expectations with personal wishes, often giving more emphasis to the latter, which was reflected in their analysis of their strengths and weaknesses and the manner in which they spelt out their ambitions and aspirations.

- They clearly perceived a sense of personal agency in themselves in terms of what they could make of their own lives and how they could contribute to the village community. Their identity was thus not limited to just the micro world in which they lived. On the contrary, they saw a patterned flow from micro to macro in terms of what was possible.

- Another idea recurrently expressed in all their responses was that studies and school-related experiences had given them the essence and the goals of their existence and a sense of optimism and hope for a better future. This was particularly apparent in their drawings.

- Their sense of self and identity was based on a continuum of their past experiences, their life at the current time and the goals they set for themselves for the future.

- A very striking feature, which showed up only in the Udaan girls, was their ability to transcend the desire to be "good girls" in terms of a societal definition of the idea. Their self and identity were thus based on dimensions of personal satisfaction and personal meaningfulness, rather than experiences external to them, or desired by others for them.

On comparing the three sample groups in terms of their gender stereotypes and roles, it was found that:

- The non-schooled girls showed a foreclosed gender identity, which typified the traditional expected pattern of their society. The formal school girls seemed to be in a state of a moratorium and indecision without being able to arrive at conclusions on many issues. The Udaan-educated girls in contrast were not guided by traditional expectations, but by the realm of possibilities and what they considered desirable for women. They appeared to communicate the idea that gender equity can be achieved through both the genders performing different tasks and embodying different traits, as well. It was not necessary that men and women did exactly the same things. On gender roles in particular, their focus was on sharing of responsibilities, being guided by pragmatic consideration on who should do what and believing that men and women should have a complementary relationship.

- In terms of their construction of masculinity, femininity and androgyny, both the non-schooled girls and formal school girls projected a traditional composition of traits. For the Udaan-educated girls, there was a domination of androgyny wherein they did not see masculine and feminine traits as mutually exclusive. They reacted quite sharply to the traditional gender beliefs that tended to project men in positions of superiority, domination and control, while women were shown as weak, inferior, vulnerable and subservient to men. They argued throughout for a more equitable relationship between the genders emphasizing repeatedly that men and women together can greatly improve the quality of both their lives. They questioned most of the traditional gender relations on the plea that they failed to take into account, women's potential and abilities. The girls seemed convinced that if given the opportunity, women can make considerable differences to their family and village life. They thus rejected the notion that women lack agency.

- With reference to gender projections for the future, they reflected an image of society wherein gender inequities are minimal and where girls are permitted access and entry into what are traditionally male spheres. Their ideal world-view on gender saw girls enjoying success, freedom, liberty and personal choice.

- They also projected an image of enhanced sensitivity among the men of their village towards women's happiness and respect for their dignity as a part of their ideal world-view. The desire for a reduction in the bad habits of men and their oppressive tendencies towards women was also expressed.

The community which included adult men and women, village level workers, the teachers who taught them at Udaan and their present formal school teachers, were of the view that these girls stood out compared with their non-literate and formal school counterparts in terms of confidence; personal hygiene and body image; ability to articulate and express themselves; their negotiation skills; desire to study and make something of their lives; competence in dealing with outdoor work, budgeting and accounts; and their desire for positing changes in practices like dowry, the age of marriage and attitude towards girls' education. All these are suggestive of psychosocial empowerment.

To make the Udaan experience meaningful for the girls, very elaborate training is given to the teachers, village level workers and programme coordinators on issues of gender equity, girls' empowerment, adolescent development, curriculum and pedagogy. They are facilitated in unlearning and negotiating with their own gender biases and stereotypes before they can engage in attitudinal reconstruction themselves. Regular workshops, sensitization sessions and experiential exercises are carried out to bring about the desired changes and develop the required attitudinal orientation. Teacher training and development is thus a major thrust area in the Udaan programme.

Community mobilization and involvement through regular village visits, home visits, community seminars and meetings is another strong feature of the programme. The objective here is to sensitize the community to the importance of girls' education and the significant contribution that it can make to their well-being. An effort is also made to enable them to rethink their perceptions about women and gender. The mothers' groups set up in the villages are an effective means through which this is achieved. The Sarvodaya Ashram shares a very facilitative relationship with the community and attributes a major portion of its success in Udaan to this.

Adolescent Girls' Learning Centres in Gujarat

Before discussing the characteristics and the features of the AGLCs in Kutch in Gujarat, it is important to understand the problems this region faces, particularly with reference to girls' education. According to the Human Development Index, Kutch features as one of the most backward districts of Gujarat, with very low female literacy rates. The enrolment and retention rates of girl students in schools are very low on account of early marriages, their involvement in wage labour, housework, or in looking after siblings. (*Household Survey*, Sudrak: May 2001)

The most significant barrier to the education of adolescent girls emerges from their preoccupation with housework, which includes chores like child care and collection of water and fuel wood for consumption. Water collection, which is the responsibility of girls is usually not easy for Kutch, which with its desert-like terrain faces acute water shortage. There is a constant wait for tankers, long walks carrying water home, and a fear that water will run out, which weighs on their minds all the time. Besides this, a large proportion of girls and women are engaged in seasonal and intermittent labour in specific agricultural operations, construction activities, as saltpan workers and in handicrafts, mainly embroidery, which Kutch is famous for. Poor women and their families thus tend to be engaged with immediate concerns of survival most of the time, and find it difficult to be involved in activities with a long-term perspective, like education.

For adolescent girls, there is an additional pressure stemming from the social compulsion to learn and do embroidery since this is a mandatory community requirement and also a symbol of a girl's community identity and marital status. In most communities in Kutch, a girl's dowry consists of carrying a rich collection of handicrafts embroidered by her. It takes many years for the girl to actually make the collection. Thus a young girl is taught to embroider at the same age an urban child starts going to school. She learns to make lines, circles, small flowers, fashion a tassel and create a purse as her first lessons. By the time she is ready to be married, she is likely to have made a rich collection of embroidered items like quilts, blouses, purses, pillow covers, head cloths, children's caps,

decorative items, and may be even a rifle cover, or turban cloth for her husband. Many girls and women use their skill in embroidery for income generation as well, and give low priority to education since it does not lead to any income (*Draft Report on Gujarat Rehabilitation Project*, Care India, 2003).

In this background, to cater to educational needs of adolescent girls and enable them to visualize a better life for themselves, CARE in collaboration with two partner NGOs, Ganatar and Gujarat Seva Samaj (GSS), established what were called Adolescent Girls' Learning Centres (AGLC) in the Anjar, Bhachau and Rapar talukas in the Kutch region. These areas were devastated by the earthquake of January 2001. They aimed at creating an awareness about the importance of girls' education and actually providing adolescent girls who were out of school, with meaningful education. It was felt that this would enable them to lead better lives and also enjoy a better position in society, based on their own capabilities. The focus was thus to provide basic literacy, numeracy and social skills.

The curriculum was designed to foster their critical thinking and analytical skills in terms of their immediate issues of concern, like their homes, families, health and villages. The teaching methods are activity-based and experiential which build upon their daily life experiences. The emphasis is on locating all learning in the reality of their everyday lives and social circumstances. Much of it was based on CARE's earlier experience with girls' education in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Language was accorded significant importance in the curriculum. It was perceived as an effective medium in approaching and dealing with one's universe. Thus girls were taught not only how to read and write, but also speak and express themselves on various subjects like themselves, their families and their neighbourhoods. The Social Learning Curriculum forms the pivot of learning. It aims at getting the girls acquainted with village institutions like the panchayat, its infrastructural facilities like the bank, post office and primary health centre with provisions for water facilities, since water is scarce in the Kutch region, and also to engender in them a sense of confidence that they can participate and use these institutions and facilities.

The larger issue of gender equity is addressed through enabling girls to function with greater autonomy and more control over their own lives and develop a questioning attitude about existing social norms, beliefs and practices prevalent in their villages. It equips them to reflect on issues like whether the timid acceptance of prevailing gender stereotypes ensures their well-being or whether there is anything wrong in exercising their right to seek their own happiness. A consequence of this is usually an opening up of their minds and the creation of new goals, gender roles and identities, to aspire for.

The vision with which CARE and its partner NGOs began their work was basically to create awareness about the importance of girls' education in a community that had excluded them from this privilege. Accordingly, they undertook a survey to map and gauge the situation, as it existed. Since their sphere of operation was in specific villages, they took cognizance of all the social and cultural barriers, which had kept girls away from education. The initial scouting task done by them was effective, in that, it provided them with a comprehensive base within which they could strategize their subsequent moves. The actual task of creating awareness about the importance of girls' education was done by launching rigorous community mobilization strategies, and simultaneously, with the help of some significant member of the village community, identifying potential persons from within the village who could assume the position of the teacher (sakhi). As part of community mobilization, mass meetings were organized, a poster campaign was launched, slogan writing was used and role plays and street plays in all the target villages were performed. A cycle rally over a radius of 300 kms spreading the need for girls' education was also undertaken. In addition to these campaigns, the dialogue initiated with village headmen (sarpanches), the village education community, and door-to-

door propaganda were kept sustained. An extremely elaborate community preparation before the intervention was launched. Community involvement and patronage were maintained through the formation of mothers' groups. Regular community seminars and public campaigns were also held in the villages. The centres were kept open to community observation, eventually targeting their ownership by the community.

An evaluation study of the AGLCs was conducted in February 2004 (Ranganathan and Kumar) to gauge the effectiveness of their functioning and assess the extent to which they had fulfilled their objectives. The overall findings showed that they had set off an entire new movement in the Kutch region in the context of perceptions, attitudes and patronage given to girls' education. It is thus important to identify and analyse the specific indicators and processes that made this possible. The specific findings of the study provided the following insights:

- The AGLCs functioned effectively, serving the educational needs of both adolescent girls and the community. They function for a duration of three hours, observing only Sundays as holidays. There are no other vacations. The majority of the girls in the age group of 10-18 years who were out of school, or had dropped out very early in the formal education system were enrolled in these centres. Attendance was fairly regular. Although the enrolment target in each centre was 30 girls, in many centres the number exceeded this, sometimes up to 50-55 girls. There was a reported growing demand for enrolment in them. Many girls were married and in the age group of 16-18 years. Evidently, age and marital status did not deter them from seeking an education.

- The timings of the centres were kept flexible, and changed according to the cropping season and village needs. They took into account the daily chores the girls had to perform, which included cooking, washing, gathering firewood drawing water and looking after their younger siblings. Thus in some centres the timings were from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., while in some others, they were as late as 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. The basic idea was to ensure that all the girls could combine their domestic responsibilities with their education.

- The curriculum offered to the girls included skills in literacy, numeracy and social learning, up to the level of early primary education in terms of equivalence with the Gujarat State Board. The literacy and numeracy skills augmented girls' competence not only in a schooled sense, but also in terms of their real-life situations. For instance, a number of functional gains, such as being able to read signboards, bus numbers and routes, letters, newspapers and other books, which their mothers could never do, became possible. They were also able to maintain budgets and accounts. They thus showed an emerging sense of functional autonomy.

- The social learning curriculum was also extremely advantageous to the girls. It helped them to understand their context better, and deal with problems and difficulties in their real world more effectively. Since it dealt largely with issues of water, health, sanitation, nutrition, disease and political institutions in the village, the girls were greatly facilitated in bringing about changes in these domains, in their own lives.

- The AGLC also served as a personal, social and psychological space for the girls. They felt refreshed by it and rejuvenated by the three hours spent there. The lack of social strictures and injunctions inhibiting their naturalness and spontaneity, the facilitative atmosphere and the non-threatening relationship they enjoyed with their teacher-facilitator contributed to their psychological comfort. This was reflected in the bright, cheerful expressions on their faces and the eagerness and enthusiasm to study, perform, talk, discuss, sing, dance, play, cycle, etc. In many ways, the AGLC became a forum for exploration and self-expression for them, which they said, never existed in their homes.

- In addition, they had a great sense of achievement at having acquired certain skills, competencies and abilities, which the larger world outside values. Their sense of self was thus based on their abilities to perform and rise to certain expected levels and standards. As a psychological process, this was the beginning of positive self-esteem.

- The practice of compiling a wall newspaper at the centre enabled them to give vent to their own feelings, experiences and views – something they had never encountered in their earlier existence. This marked the joy of discovering autonomous spaces.

- The spirit of togetherness, and peer group bonding visible among the girls at the AGLCs is remarkable. Psychologically, many of the girls' socio-emotional needs like belongingness, acceptance, group affiliation, peer identity, social recognition and prestige, were thus addressed. In many centres, the creative needs of the girls are also included. For example, some girls were found composing poetry and songs on their own, or describing their educational experiences. They also danced in groups with ease. Many of them made articles from waste material, like matchsticks, ice cream sticks, Coca Cola caps, etc, which they showed off with pride. The sense of satisfaction and personal accomplishment derived from these experiences was very evident.

- Games were also a tangible part of the curriculum experiences of the girls. All of them expressed joy at being able to play carrom, snakes and ladders, ride bicycles, play badminton, flying discs and even cricket. This aspect of their lives, they admitted, had never been experienced by them before, since at home, they were "social objects" with chores to perform, and subjected to a long list of don'ts, which said, "big girls don't play". Access to games had thus enabled them to transcend gender boundaries in the village. In addition, they were able to satisfy their risk, adventure and activity needs.

- Most centres have been located in conducive physical spaces with a distinct learning ambience, and adequate infrastructural facilities. They enjoy facilitative patronage and support from mothers' groups. Members of the mother' groups and other community members were discovered visiting the centre regularly to observe and often participate in its day-to-day activities. In fact it was observed that the mothers' group negotiates with the community to ensure the continuity of girls' attendance and enrolment at the centres. They take great pride in their daughters' achievements, and many expressed regret at not having studied themselves. In many ways it appeared that by becoming the educational hubs of the village, the AGLCs had assumed the proportion of community centres.

Girls' empowerment was visible in several aspects of their being. Most of them were confident, articulate and forthcoming in expressing their views, showed initiative, took responsibility when required, and displayed a sense of personal adequacy and accomplishment with all that they had learned. Many had also changed their views on certain previously held beliefs, since they had developed the ability to question existing systems and look for alternatives. For instance, on the gender equity issue, the fact that women can also be in positions of power and domination and the enormity of a woman's role in family life had already begun to engage their attention. Many of them have aspirations to migrate to towns and pursue jobs. Empowerment thus gets reflected as a sense of identity, through attitudinal development and through career aspirations in these girls.

In order to know their level of empowerment, as a task, girls were put into imaginary situations of power and decision-making. When asked about the reforms or changes which they wished to institute when in power, they talked about infrastructural reforms on the one hand (building roads, transportation systems, hospitals, schools, etc) and social reforms

like changing the dress code expected of them, rethinking the age of marriage for girls and doing away with the compulsion of embroidery as part of the preparation of items for their marriage dowries. It was obvious that they had begun to realize that they could have more autonomy and control over their lives.

- Many girls who were members of the Social Change Agent Groups (Kishori Panchayat or Prerna Groups), an institutionalized mechanism to give them leadership opportunities in the centres, somewhat akin to the prefect and her team in formal schools, displayed visible pride in being vested with power and importance. They were able to spell out their roles and functions with great clarity. The system helped the girls realize their potential to wield power and influence in the set-up in which they functioned. It also gave them an experience of participative democracy and contributing towards the welfare of the village.

- A very striking feature of the AGLCs is that many caste groups[3] coexist very harmoniously. There is no caste exclusion. The mothers' group has representatives belonging to different castes, as do the adolescent girls' groups. Differences across their lifestyles and beliefs were not found to interfere with their common commitment to study and learn.

- At the AGLCs many girls expressed a desire to study Hindi and English. This was justified by a wish to communicate with the outside world and be able to talk to visitors, foreigners, etc. There was thus a clear striving for social mobility and connectedness with the larger world. Their exposure to the outside world was also possible through organizing excursions to cities like Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mumbai, Delhi, etc. It is significant to note that these were not just recreational excursions for the girls. They were meaningful experiences, which enabled them to discover the larger world and view themselves from a different perspective.

The AGLCs had thus expanded their awareness, knowledge and understanding about the real world, empowered them to have ideas, beliefs and notions of their own, not necessarily consonant with what they had been socialized to believe.

SARD's Education Programme for Adolescent Girls

The work of the Society for All Round Development (SARD) is of immense significance since here, as the education and empowerment of adolescent girls was undertaken in the restrictive context of an educationally backward minority community. The site where the work is in active progress is located in the Mewat portion of Bharatpur district in Rajasthan. Mewat takes its name from its largest ethnic community, the Meos. Meos are Muslim peasants who converted from Hinduism to Islam in several stages beginning in the 11th century. They were initially Rajput Hindus. Many of them still retain their Hindu caste names and celebrate both Muslim and Hindu festivals. Economically, the Meos are very poor since they depend for survival on small rain-fed farms, supplemented by animal husbandry. In terms of their cultural beliefs the Meos have preserved many Hindu customs. Their Islamic practices too do not extend much beyond male circumcision and burying the dead. This has resulted in their relative isolation from other traditional Muslim and Hindu communities. However, recently the Meos have become more conscious of their Muslim identity which may be attributed to the efforts of religious groups which are actively trying to promote Islamic teachings and practices. SARD's project area consists of five Meo Muslim dominant villages of the Deeg block in Mewat, Bharatpur.

According to a preliminary survey conducted in 2000 by SARD, Mewat ranked well below the national and state averages with respect to sex ratio, literacy, school attendance and infant mortality rates. Literacy and school attendance rates for Meo girls as a group were among the lowest in the

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[3] The range of caste groups in the AGLCs include Ahirs who are primarily peasants, Darbars or the landowning higher caste group, Kolis who are scheduled tribes, Muslims, Patels or the financially strong caste and Rabaris or the nomadic tribes.

country. A base line survey conducted in the same year showed that only 25 per cent of all adult Meos and 3 2 per cent of women over 15 years of age were literate. The school enrolment rates were 40 per cent for girls and 60 per cent for boys. These were not only very low but also indicative of gender inequalities. In terms of girls' education, it was found that the prevailing view in the community desired girls to receive religious instruction and proficiency in reading the Koran (Din-e-Talim) in the village mosques, under the supervision of Maulvis. Madrasa education was thus the only kind of education that received patronage for girls. Very few girls were thus sent to formal schools because the community feared that sending their girls to a regular school would mean an attack on their identity, or a disguised attempt to convert them (*The Hindu*, August 30,1999).Of the few girls who do enrol in formal primary schools, the dropout rate is very high. Those who complete their primary schooling are not allowed to continue further, since middle and high schools are located at some distance, requiring the girls to commute up to three to four kilometres, which becomes a social constraint.

Another factor that kept girls away from education was the burden of housework. There is a strong patriarchal set-up in this region because of which women's energy is kept restricted to the kitchen and the fields. Their participation in the development process of their own village is non-existent and they are denied any decision-making role even within their own family contexts. Although the women do not observe purdah, this is not in any way suggestive of enjoying an empowered status. Early marriage is also highly prevalent in the region. In almost all the villages, girls between 13-16 years of age are married off to grooms between 17 and 19 years. Although dowry is not a common practice among Muslims, it features in the community of the Meos, since the girls have no rights to ancestral property. It thus becomes the girls' share of the family property. This also contributes to the perception of girls being a burden to the family.

The overall literacy rates in the villages where SARD has made its intervention are much below the national literacy rate for rural India. SARD's own survey showed that adult female literacy rates in the villages of Gadi Mewat, Padla and Toda are as low as 2.7 per cent, 4.1 per cent and 2.8 per cent respectively. Among the literate females, none have studied beyond Class V. Yet SARD decided to begin its intervention programme with a positive attitude, without being intimidated by the poor socio-cultural conditions that existed. It rationalized its work by attributing low levels of literacy and enrolment in schools to poor quality primary schools that existed in the area. Furthermore, the backwardness of the Meo Muslim community was explained in terms of the socio-religious beliefs which predisposed the people to favour religious education over formal schooling, especially for their daughters. The poor developmental status of the community was attributed to lack of adequate cooperation between the community and educational officials of the area. Thus the work started on a very positive footing and the community was given due respect, without any element of blame focussing on its orthodoxy or parochial nature.

In fact it is worth mentioning here that girls' empowerment was targeted by SARD through networking with the community and creating a climate of greater acceptance of the idea, without directly making the community feel that their belief systems or socio-cultural practices were actually the causal factors of women's backwardness. They view community participation as integral to the process of girls' empowerment and thus try to promote its active involvement in all their intervention programmes, especially education. They work through Community Based Organizations (CBO) and Parent Teacher Committees (PTC). The CBOs and PTCs are village level institutions that mediate between SARD and the community to improve programme planning and implementation of its interventions. They also motivate parents to enrol their children, especially girls, in school and carry the additional responsibility of monitoring the village schools, mobilizing resources for the centres set up by SARD and promoting educational development in their respective villages.

SARD conducts a variety of capacity building activities for CBO and PTC members in which the importance of girls' empowerment through education is given primary importance. Two other important

community stakeholders in the context of the Meo Muslims are the religious leaders and the Panchayati Raj Institutions. SARD realized very early in its work that no intervention would be possible without patronage from the religious leaders. It thus regularly apprises the Maulvis of developments and goals in its programme and also includes them in its capacity building efforts. As a result of these approaches, religious resistance to the education programme has declined dramatically. Panchayati Raj Institution members are invited to meetings regularly in order to solicit their patronage.

The nature of SARD's work with adolescent girls can thus best be understood as an intensive community development approach wherein initially, the concern was with creating readiness and acceptance for girls' education and then gradually getting the community to accept ownership for it. The belief was that once education receives patronage, empowerment would automatically follow. Recognizing the wide age span which adolescence covers, SARD adopted two basic educational approaches.

The first approach sought to enrol out-of-school adolescent girls in the age group of 10-14 years into what it called Quality Education Centres (QEC) with the intention that after intensive training for a period of one or two years the girls would acquire enough formal educational skills to enable them to be mainstreamed into the existing government school system. The focus in the QECs was thus on providing academic preparation in language, mathematics and basic science, which was consonant with what the formal schools followed. However, the teaching methodology and evaluation process were interactive and learner-centred, making education an enjoyable experience. The empowerment of girls was conceptualized as equipping them with skills like numeracy, literacy, thinking, reasoning and problem-solving, with the belief that they would be able to use them in their everyday lives. This would ensure a more self-determined and proactive existence for them. Gender equity was not targeted as a separate issue. It was believed that highlighting the girls' abilities, competence and the need to educate them, would in themselves lead to strengthening of their position in society.

The second approach aimed at reaching out to older adolescent girls who were in the age group of 15-18 years, and had never been to school. They were not allowed to enrol in the QECs because they were older and on the brink of marriage. Realizing the futility of pushing for formal education for these girls against the wishes of the community, SARD changed its strategy in their case. Adhering to the prime objective of girls' empowerment and given the context of their impending marriages and family life, SARD decided to develop a programme centring around 'family life education' for them. This included themes related to health, nutrition, bodily changes, sexuality, reproductive health, cleanliness and hygiene of the home, optimal family size, parenting, etc. The idea was to enhance their knowledge and understanding of these issues and build up progressive attitudes towards them. The main aim however, was to enable girls to understand that these were the very domains in which they could make their presence known, take decisions and exercise their control. Empowerment was thus seen as the process through which girls would discover their own voice, personal space and agency.

Seven adolescent girls' groups have been formed for family life education. Fortnightly sessions are held for a duration of three to four hours each. The social workers from SARD visit the villages where these groups exist to provide the education. Initially the attendance was low and there was an element of community resistance. Gradually however, the situation was seen to improve. The programme is still very new having started only a few months ago. Its impact on the girls' lives cannot therefore be analysed. A focused group discussion organized recently by SARD (March 2005) showed that some gains in knowledge and awareness were reported by the girls.

It must be emphasized here, that although this paper has focused on describing the positive attributes and achievements of the three micro initiatives, their paths were not easy. They faced and

dealt with many challenges and difficulties. They experienced moments of frustration and sometimes even a sense of not being able to proceed. Space constraints do not permit articulation of these. Furthermore, a dilemma which continues to haunt them is whether their work with the girls will indeed ensure a better quality of life for them on a sustained long-term basis to ensure that the girls are happy and empowered even as adult women.

Lessons Learned From the Initiatives

I would now like to focus on the lessons learned from these initiatives. To begin with it is important to note that in all the three interventions, care was taken to ensure that the primary cultural identity of the girls was not eroded. The approach was thus not to be confrontationist and rejecting of the existing environment in which the girls lived, but to retain their sense of belonging and commitment to their villages and community. However, they were encouraged to develop a sense of hope and optimism that by positing certain small but significant changes in their lives, families, and their worldview, they could ensure that the girls and women in their villages, would lead qualitatively better lives. The emphasis was thus on exploring possibilities and the various ways and spaces through which the girls and women could actually lead better lives. In this manner, the girls were not destabilized psychologically, in any way. They were only shown ways in which they could change some of their perceptions and attitudes, and rethink how their lives should be. The Udaan-educated girls, for example, had been able, through their own behaviour and attitudes, become role models for their villages. The commitment to girls' education, needs to resist early marriages and parenthood, rethink issues of dowry, large family sizes, and enable women to participate in decision-making. These were highlighted as the small but significant areas where they were able to bring about changes in the perception and outlook of their mothers and fathers.

The results of the Udaan impact study (Ranganathan and Jaimini, 2005) showed that the male members of the community began to show greater acceptance and open-mindedness towards their daughters' zeal and enthusiasm for education. They also admitted to often finding themselves in contentious situations in as far as their daughters' marriages vis-à-vis their educational wishes, were concerned, which they said they usually resolved in favour of the latter. They often felt compelled to reflect upon and rethink some of the village practices and beliefs in this regard. While these were endorsed by the women of the community as well, they added that the Udaan-educated girls had managed to set off a meaningful process of change, reformulation, and reorganization of many health, nutrition, and home-management issues as well, which enabled them to improve the quality of their domestic lives, quite substantially.

In a similar stead, the AGLCs of Kutch had become like large community centres in which many men and women of the village were found to be voluntarily participating. Through this process, they also became beneficiaries of the Social Learning Curriculum. In fact some adult members of the nomadic Rabari community reported that the joy derived from seeing their grown-up daughters being educated and learning so many new things about the world, had compelled several of them to rethink their frequent movement from one place to another and stay in a permanent dwelling instead (Ranganathan and Kumar, 2004). Clearly they had experienced the benefits of education.

Regarding the girls of the Meo Muslim community, the religious basis of their identity was not questioned. Instead, school timings were set in a manner that the continuity between the Din-e-Talim, which the community wished them to receive, and formal education could be maintained. Religious education and formal education were not seen as antithetical to each other, but as complementary and necessary components of education. The result was that the girls began to develop proficiency in both spheres, which had not been the case in the past, where the insistence was on religious education alone. Formal education was perceived as threatening the acquisition of the basic religious identity of the girls. The community had thus consciously kept its adolescent girls away

from formal education. With SARD's work establishing the essential continuity between the two, and the community recognizing the positive changes accruing to their daughters, formal education started receiving their patronage. Thus from their initial resistance, there was a significant movement towards participation, and encouragement and eventually ownership of the education centres by the community in many villages.

Another strength shared by the three initiatives was the way in which they conceptualized the notion of gender equity itself. In all the three settings, the role division of labour and the tasks and characteristics ascribed to men and women reflected the traditional stereotypical patterns. Instead of impelling girls to question this and feel victimized about their subordination as the weaker gender, they were encouraged to discover the potential in themselves for undertaking what were defined as masculine tasks and characteristics.

The Udaan-educated girls thus expressed a visible sense of pride in being able to cycle, visit the market on their own, talk to strangers, dialogue with their own elder brothers and fathers, share their views about issues, discharge bank and post office-related tasks, assist in the family business and participate in family decision-making (Ranganathan and Jaimini, 2005).

For the girls of the AGLCs and Kishori Samoohs, the realization that they could think on their own, ask questions, express their own views, come and go on their own to the centre and perform academic tasks which their brothers and fathers could, enabled them to see themselves as members of their communities from a position of strength as opposed to the position of subordination that they had earlier been socialized into. Their educational experiences helped them to realize that the existing gender beliefs were not fixed or unquestionable and could be rethought and re-envisaged. Thus in all the three initiatives equity was addressed through building an androgynous[4] gender identity. This did not limit them to the traditional model of femininity. It is important to substantiate the argument further with findings drawn from the impact study of Udaan (Ranganathan and Jaimini, 2005). The Udaan-educated girls believed that gender equity could be achieved through both the genders performing different tasks and embodying different traits as well. It was not necessary that women and men did exactly the same thing. In terms of characteristics and traits, they saw high degrees of complementarities between masculine and feminine traits. They thus had a significant sense of pride in being "female" and not once did they express a desire to be male. Their gender-based worldview held the image of women being competent and empowered, working in tandem with their male counterparts.

The entire issue of gender equity can be located in the substantive approach to gender equality.[5] In this conceptualization, the concern is not only with equality in treatment but equality in terms of outcome. The approach questions the ways in which gendering results in the subordination of girls and correspondingly imposes pressures of masculinity on boys. It believes in developing in girls the ability to question relations of power that are central to the hierarchies of gender. Further, while it recognizes the gendered difference between girls and boys, it does not accept this difference as given. Instead it examines the assumptions behind it, tries to assess the disadvantage resulting from it and develops a different treatment that dismantles the disadvantage. It thus addresses differences in ways that help learners to overcome disadvantage, value their differentiated capabilities and develop them to the fullest. The implication is that processes of education have to be designed to ensure that girls are sufficiently empowered to overcome disadvantage rather than reinforce their subordination.

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[4] The concept of androgyny discussed here has been drawn from Sandra Bem (1987). It basically denotes that instead of traditional femininity characterized by a domination of expressive traits, and traditional masculinity characterized by instrumental traits, an androgynous gender identity permits a healthy combination of both, irrespective of whether one is male or female.

[5] This has been articulated in the position paper on Gender in the Draft National Curriculum Framework (2005) wherein, equality takes into account diversity, difference, disadvantage and discrimination.

The holistic education and life experiences provided by Udaan, the AGLCs and Kishori Samoohs, particularly with their emphasis on social learning and life skills education, ensure to a large extent that the education received by the girls is an empowering process. In adjustment psychology, this may be explained as the movement from "learned helplessness" to "learned optimism", a concept provided by Martin Seligman (1990). According to him, learned helplessness is maladaptive passivity that frequently follows an individual's experience with uncontrollable events, leading to a diminished sense of personal control. This in turn leads to a host of physical and psychological difficulties. However, it is not the uncontrollable events in themselves that produce learned helplessness, rather it is the internal tendency of individuals to surrender control over their lives, probably because of attitudinal training and socialization experiences, which leads to helplessness. This can be overcome by providing enabling experiences that target attitudinal reconstruction and more adaptive thinking, which would then enable the individual to move towards "learned optimism". In learned optimism the emphasis is on the individual reinterpreting her belief systems, to restore her sense of perceived control. This may certainly be understood as a worthwhile strategy for empowerment.

This brings us directly to the issue of how the micro initiatives defined and handled empowerment. In its very generic form, empowerment refers to the process of gaining control over self, resources and over decision-making. When education is seen as a process of gender empowerment the implication is that it would enable girls to:

- Build up self-confidence, a positive self-image and self-esteem.

- Develop in them the ability for critical thinking so that they can analyse, evaluate and rethink the existing structures of power and domination.

- Gain better access to resources that are enabling, and project them in a better light.

- Build up their decision-making abilities so that they can make more informed choices.

- Lead more goal-oriented and progressive lives that are self-determined (Batliwala, 1993; Indiresan, 2002; National Empowerment Policy for Women, 2001).

For the Udaan-educated girls, these indicators were addressed by weaving them into the curriculum experiences that were provided. In fact the curriculum transaction process and pedagogic style adopted here situate the adolescent girl at the centre of the educational process and value her as an active learner who is capable of giving meaning to what she is experiencing and constructing knowledge on her own through suitable facilitation which, in a Vygotskyian[6] perspective would imply scaffolding. It is significant to note however that rather than focusing on subject mastery alone, the girls are encouraged to develop a spirit of critical inquiry, a sense of analysis, a quest for seeking alternative sources of knowledge and most importantly, fully understanding what they are being taught. Examples used by the teachers are drawn from the actual "lived experiences" of the girls, so that they acquire personal meaning and greater relevance.

A special feature of Udaan is that irrespective of whether it is a specific subject curriculum or the social learning curriculum, which is transacted, the subliminal message of girls as capable, competent and achieving whatever they want to, gets communicated. This feature is reflected in the co-curricular activities, too. The girls are thus found to be bold, expressive and willing to voluntarily learn several skills that they earlier believed to be part of the male domain. Their self-image and self-esteem are built up through this process as well. They are also provided a number of success experiences both big and small, to uphold their motivation. Several fora where they could develop and express their

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[6] Vygotsky was a Social Constructivist who greatly upheld the role of adults and peers as facilitators in enabling an individual to achieve or reach what he/ she has the potential for. This was how scaffolding was explained.

talents and skills were made available to them, encouraging their participation. These included co-curricular activities, special programmes and assemblies, games and sports, wall magazines, newsletters, field visits to new places and community meetings.

In the AGLCs and Kishori Samoohs too, the emphasis is on developing skills and attitudes, which serve to build up girls' self-esteem, decision-making abilities and sense of autonomy rather than focusing on subject knowledge and mastery. Education is thus perceived as a process of attitudinal training and skill development, which enable girls to lead more enlightened and empowered lives at least in their own micro contexts. The World Health Organization (1998) termed these skills as life skills and asserted that education must move away from its academic centredness alone and incorporate "education for life" through life skills training of students. While formal schools in urban contexts are struggling to weave in life skills education into their schooling processes, it is indeed commendable that initiatives in girls' education, despite being in the rural areas have made these their primary goal and have organized all their educational processes around them. The effort clearly aims at equipping and enabling girls for life.

Further, empowerment has been understood by these three initiatives not only as processes aimed at raising the social consciousness of girls towards gender issues, but as the feeling that enables a person to do what she wants and feel psychologically energized to accomplish her goals. Stromquist (1993) has identified four clear dimensions of empowerment: cognitive, psychological, economic and political.

Cognitive empowerment involves an understanding of the subordinate conditions and their causes, and the ability to critically review one's experiences in order to notice or identify patterns of behaviour, which lead to dependence and hence, reinforce subordination. Cognitive empowerment therefore calls for knowledge and an understanding of the self, as well as the need to make choices that may at times go against cultural and social expectations.

Psychological empowerment is concerned with women's feelings and the belief that they can change their situations themselves. Women are normally socialized to be submissive, to serve, and to let the men in their lives make all decisions affecting them. Psychological empowerment involves the reversal of this patriarchal scheme of things. It entails competence in making decisions at the personal and social levels in order to improve one's situation.

Economic empowerment involves the ability of women to engage in income-generating activities, which will give them an independent income. Economic independence requires that women be provided opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills, which will ultimately give them access to jobs. Political empowerment entails the ability to analyse situations politically, and also mobilization for social change. Collective action has been identified as an important prerequisite for any meaningful social and political change. Through engaging in collective action, women would be able to raise social and cultural awareness among others and therefore influence social change.

The Udaan and AGLC initiative certainly address all these dimensions, while SARD, given the difficulties of the context in which it functions, focuses mainly on cognitive and psychological empowerment. As institutions, all the three initiatives perceive empowerment as the process of providing an appropriate environment and structure and creating conditions and experiences through which girls can fully use their faculties and abilities to actualize their potential, thereby reposing faith in the belief that individuals carry within them the potential for self-actualization, an idea recurrently expressed in humanistic psychology and education. This is something, which the cotemporary national policies and curriculum framework groups are struggling to operationalize.

Closely allied to girls' empowerment is the concept of their "psychological well-being", an idea drawn from the discipline of mental health. Psychological well-being when linked with empowerment

implies that girls begin to perceive themselves as "subjects" rather than "objects". They learn to recognize their own feelings, experiences and psychological needs as the fundamental determinants of their happiness, and therefore also learn to give primacy to their fulfilment. This enables them to understand that they are "human beings" first and "girls" second, and thus they also have what I would like to call "psychological rights" similar to those of men.

There are two reasons why I would like to use the term psychological rights. The first reason emerges from the fact that although psychological rights essentially relate to the psychological needs of all human beings, which include the need for love, security, sexuality, belongingness, self-expression, recognition, prestige and autonomy, they have differential implications for men and women. For men they become privileges but in the case of women they are consciously suppressed, kept unrecognized, making them the sources of disempowerment. In fact, they become the very domains in which, through the socialization process, girls gradually become divested of what feminist discourse would call "voice" and "agency".

The second reason for using the term is that an entire "re-socialization" and "unlearning" effort has to be organized both for the girls and other concerned societal agencies before they can begin to understand the importance of girls' psychological needs. One of the simplest ways to achieve this would be to link them with the concept of human rights – a term which is fairly well understood even in rural areas. Right through the 20th century, one of the most important socio-political movements has been the concern for the human rights of women. It has left no country untouched by the demand for gender equality and the pressure for equal representation of women in all spheres of development, through suitable constitutional provisions, policy initiatives and actual practices. This process of linking psychological rights with human rights will help to draw the attention of all significant groups towards the importance of women's needs, much more effectively. The importance given to girls' psychological needs at Udaan, and the AGLCs, led to them building up a sense of self and a gender identity, in which significant emphasis was given to their own wishes, feelings, desires and experiences, as against relying on societal expectations alone. This showed thereby that recognizing and fulfilling girls' psychological needs by creating suitable spaces in education, can also be a means to gender empowerment.

Another lesson learned from the micro-initiatives in the context of equity and empowerment, is that gender is not just a women's issue; it is a people's issue.[7] There is a need to understand that femininity does not exist in isolation from masculinity. The image and power of one determines the image and power of the other (Bhasin, 2000). In this context, formal strategies like engendering texts, portraying sensitive descriptions of discrimination faced by girls and women, upholding positive female role models, initiating practices which question stereotypical gender beliefs, are appropriate as a starting point. However, changing community mindsets and enabling all significant other groups, particularly the men, to review their own attitudes towards their gender beliefs is essential. In all the three initiatives, community preparation and education remained concurrent with the efforts at educating the girls. This ensured that after passing out of the school, girls could continue to retain their re-conceptualized beliefs and lead lives based on them.

Till very recently, adolescence was viewed through the lens of developmental psychology as a universal phenomena common to all those between the ages of 12-18 years. All the three initiatives have been able to question the adequacy of this view by demonstrating how variable the actual experience of adolescence can be, especially in terms of the regional and cultural factors that determine it. That adolescence in Kutch is different from adolescence in Hardoi and adolescence in the Meo Muslim community, is something they all recognize. Thus in each place the approach for organizing schooling processes was different, although the goals of gender equity and empowerment are similar,

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[7] This idea has been expressed in the position paper on Gender in the Draft National Curriculum Framework (2005) as well.

thereby corroborating the view that it is necessary to think of several adolescences (Brown, Larson and Saraswati, 2002) and likewise several educational initiatives.

In the context of the child-adult, continuity-discontinuity debate, their work has been able to show that adolescence is not merely an urban phenomenon, nor is it an artefact of an industrial society. It exists in rural India as well, and holds great potential in the human development lifespan to enable girls to consolidate a sense of identity, come to terms with their sexuality and develop a set of life skills and attitudes to help them lead more aware and informed adult lives. It is just that rural India tends not to recognize it, and pushes its girls into adult responsibilities and lifestyles, from late childhood itself, denying them the experience of adolescence. To this end, education can play a key role in emphasizing adolescence as a legitimate period for preparation for adult life.

Finally, probably the most significant lesson learned from all the three initiatives is that wherever girls' empowerment and gender equity are being targeted, "gender" has to be seen as central to organizing the life experiences of girls at school since it is the critical marker of transformation. It should thus not have "only" add-on value but constitute the key objective which cuts across all schooling experiences – the subjects studied at school, the nature of co-curricular activities, the teacher-student relationship, the classroom processes, the structural mechanisms set up for personality development, and in the objectives of schooling as well. It is only then that the central paradox, which sees education as a site for reproduction of social values and stereotypes that bind and constrain on the one hand, but also a potential site for empowerment on the other, will get resolved in favour of the latter. Girls' education will then be understood as a process aimed at expanding human capacities and moving towards a more just and equitable society as against being a reproductive process aimed at socializing learners into the norms, values and structures of power, typifying an existing social order.

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Education, Gender and Citizenship : Analysing Experiences of Khabar Lahariya

Dipta Bhog and Shalini Joshi

In a session with Delhi schoolteachers on their feedback on the new civics textbooks[1] introduced by the Delhi government in 2004, a teacher responded to the chapter on citizenship, which formed part of the Class VII standard textbook. The teacher observed: "When I read this chapter I felt like immolating myself. (*Atma daah karne kaa maan kiyaa*). I never imagined that I would live to see a day where the school textbook would be written in such a problematic way."

What disturbed the teacher so deeply was not the content of the chapter but the language. It had been written with the feminine as the norm. This was the first time that *naagarikata* had been given an exclusive female identity in the Hindi language.

"Does this mean that all the men in this country are not *naagariks*?" was his agitated inquiry. His anxiety at the exclusion of *"he"*, the setting out of the feminine as the norm, mirrored the deep and primary connection he saw between citizenship and men. There are no marks for concluding that citizenship still eludes women despite all efforts at granting them equal status.

Shift to *Khabar Lahariya*.[2] On the surface, it is an initiative that invariably brings forth appreciative murmurs. A group of poor, Dalit and tribal women, situated in Chitrakoot,[3] a "backward" district of Uttar Pradesh (UP), bring out their own newspaper. In a district that is a post-modernist mix of firmly entrenched feudal and caste structures, dacoit-related violence and looting, and modern-day institutions of police and administration, *Khabar Lahariya* emerges as a ray of hope[4] in demonstrating the possibility of a democratic future for India.

The "feel good" factor the Khabar Lahariya experience generates is more a response of those who see themselves as outsiders, far removed from the underbelly of daily negotiations and struggles that

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[1] The Delhi State Council Education Research and Training (SCERT) produced the series 'Hamara Samaj Hamara Rajya ' in 2004 as part of its Indradhanush series for middle-school children. Nirantar was part of the coordination team for the writing of these textbooks.

[2] Khabar Lahariya (literally meaning news ripples), a project of Nirantar, is a fortnightly newspaper produced by a group of seven predominantly Dalit and Kol (a tribe in Bundelkhand) women in Chitrakoot district, Uttar Pradesh. The publication, which started in 2002, now has a readership all over the Bundelkhand region along with other states. Written in the local language, Bundeli, the content of Khabar Lahariya includes current news – political developments at the local and national levels, reports on the functioning of the local administration, news on cases of violence against women and caste-based violence, information on government schemes and policies, articles on local history, and lighter items. Nirantar is responsible for providing editorial support, organizing capacity-building inputs for the reporters, setting up systems for the newspaper and the group and for providing financial assistance.

[3] Chitrakoot, previously part of Banda district, is part of the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. A harsh climate, barren land, vanishing forests and an acute water crisis characterize the region. The long-standing practice of bonded labour, acute poverty and feudalism have combined to generate conditions of extreme caste, class and gender-based discrimination. The presence of local gangs and banditry has often lead to Chitrakoot being described as an area driven by the rule of the gun. The district ranks low in the state and natural averages in income, sex ratio (872) and female literacy (51 per cent), with incidents of rape, dowry, death and domestic violence as everyday occurrences.

[4] Khabar Lahariya received the Chameli Devi Jain Award for excellence in journalism in 2004. The Media Foundation, based in New Delhi, gave the award to the group. Members of Khabar Lahariya have been awarded the Dalit Foundation Fellowship for reportage on Dalit issues. They have featured extensively on the national and state print and electronic media.

the Khabar Lahariya women face during the course of their work. It also raises critical questions regarding what the process of claiming citizenship means for women. It brings to the fore the limits, challenges and the possibilities that exist in efforts by practitioners to engender citizenship. It also points to the role education can play in introducing inventive and provocative processes that push the boundaries of notions regarding citizenship. This paper, through its reflections on the Khabar Lahariya experience, attempts to examine the connections between education, gender and citizenship, in the hope that we may move to a future in our educational practice where the teacher would not reduce citizenship to mere acceptance of rules regarding traffic and garbage disposal. And would focus his energies on facilitating the learner to reflect on why it feels uncomfortable to read a chapter with the feminine as the norm.

Education

From Development to Citizenship

Khabar Lahariya's precursor was Mahila Dakiya, (MD), which was started in 1993 as a partnership between Nirantar[5] and the Mahila Samakhya[6] (MS) programme in Chitrakoot district, UP. The impetus for Mahila Dakiya came from the need to sustain reading and writing skills acquired by rural women in literacy camps. As a post-literacy activity, a broadsheet was planned where women could come and share their experiences, and use literacy in a context that was meaningful to them. Literacy as a means to gain access to the written word and the power of information in rural women's lives merged together in the objectives of the broadsheet. At this stage Nirantar also felt that it was important to decentralize and democratize the production of material. If women needed reading material that was responsive to their needs, then why could they not take part in creating it? This meant exploring a new dimension in participatory material creation. For Nirantar it also translated into not just limiting itself to providing technical inputs in material creation, but also into building women's confidence to produce their own broadsheet and breaking stereotypes associated with who can be the providers of information. Bringing neo-literate, poor, rural women into the role of information providers, was also aimed at breaking class and caste monopolies over information.

The initial phase of Mahila Dakiya focused on giving voice to the experiences of women who were part of the MS programme. This was an energizing phase, where poor Dalit and tribal women raised issues of water, violence and livelihoods and these were reflected back to the community through the broadsheet. The training of women as hand pump mechanics, their travels to other states as part of exposure visits and contestations with the local, powerful landlords and upper caste sensibilities gave a dynamic profile to the broadsheet. As the publication took the shape of a product that moved beyond Mahila Samakhya's activities and events, issues of self-sustainability and independence came up. Though it is impossible to map a highly varied and rich history of seven years,[7] it is the subscription issue that pointed to the limits of bringing out a broadsheet, closely identified with a developmental programme.

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[5] Nirantar is a resource group for women and education, based in Delhi. The organization was formed in 1993, with the objective of integrating education into empowerment work for rural women. To meet the information needs of rural audiences, Nirantar has been working for over ten years on creating informative and interesting material for adult readers. They have been producing magazines, booklets and other material in simple language, informed by a gender perspective, for rural audiences. Nirantar has also been involved in training activists of other NGOs in publishing and producing their own material.

[6] Mahila Samakhya was launched as a pilot project by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Education) in 1989. Initiated first in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat, it has now expanded to several other states. The objective of Mahaila Samakhya is the empowerment of the women.

[7] As a local broadsheet, Mahila Dakiya became quite popular in the area. It was especially popular among those living in remote villages. The broadsheet was their only source of news and information. It connected them to developments in other parts of the district and sometimes with developments at the national level. Written in the local dialect, Bundeli, Mahila Dakiya was the first publication of its kind in the area.

The team that produced MD was now a regular group of seven women. Their sense of commitment and ownership with regard to the newspaper had also increased over the years. During this period the issue of pricing MD and making it self-sustainable in the long term became significant. The group producing MD felt that by pricing the newspaper, readers would not take it for granted, and buying the newspaper would also add value to the publication. In the year 2000, MD became a priced publication. However, this generated considerable tension within the programme as MS saw this as a move by the group to become autonomous. MS was not keen to let go of the broadsheet, as it had become a significant part of its identity in the area, apart from the accolades that MD had won. Slowly, programme functionaries took over the content of MD and as a token, called one of the seven members occasionally.

After 1998, the broadsheet became erratic, didactic and a mere mouthpiece for developmental news and events. The MS programme, after completing a decade of work in the district was in the process of phasing out. As part of this phasing out strategy, the production of MD ended abruptly in the year 2000. Members of Mahila Dakiya who were keen to continue work on the broadsheet got in touch with Nirantar to explore this possibility. In 2002, *Khabar Lahariya* was born.

What were the new challenges that the group faced? Mahila Dakiya had firmly established that rural, neo-literate women could bring out their own publication. They had demonstrated their ability in bringing out gender-sensitive material, geared to a local readership that took on board language hierarchies and was therefore produced in the local language, Bundeli. *Khabar Lahariya* positioned itself as a newspaper that was not tied to any organization or programme. Nirantar was aware that while its own role was critical in ensuring that *Khabar Lahariya* emerged in the area as a newspaper, it would work with the vision of establishing the women as an independent, autonomous group. Registering *Khabar Lahariya* separately after the initial phase, was part of this strategy. Nirantar was to play a supportive role in providing inputs and strengthening the group in becoming independent.

A significant corollary to becoming a newspaper was the concept of being a journalist. Gone was the identity of being a member of the MS programme, a mere functionary in a large structure spread over 100 villages. Along with this, went the comfort and security of knowing that in a crisis situation the link with a government programme would provide a protective buffer. They were now entering the public arena, where their location in a fledging journalistic venture gave them no special access or protection, which local journalists assume while working for well-established papers like *Nav Bharat Times*, *Amar Ujala*, etc.

The implications of becoming journalists, though not explicit to Nirantar then, meant that they had to grapple with processes and educational interventions, which had a direct bearing on the construction of women as citizens. As members of the fourth estate, the media, Khabar Lahariya members were catapulted directly into a critical institution of civil society. The inherent logic of becoming part of a civil society institution was to move away from traditional systems of privilege, based on caste, status and family, and engage in issues of "public interest" as individuals. To attain the status of individuals, as women circumscribed by their caste and class identities was and is an ongoing negotiation. Therefore, while *Khabar Lahariya* set out to accomplish its role as a newspaper, which is the creation of public opinion where the State is subject to the moral authority of its citizens, the women simultaneously were constructing themselves as citizens.

Learning the Ropes

Reporting skills were first on the agenda. Newsgathering was a new skill for the group, as in MD they were responsible for the writing, editing and production of the broadsheet. In the MD process the primary source of information was the MS field-based workers (sahyoginis) and village-level

animators. MD members did bring in news from their own villages and conducted interviews at the block level or then gathered information about schemes from government offices. At Khabar Lahariya they were expected to collect news directly by visiting villages, building contacts with people and were to understand the concept of sources.

An initial workshop was organized where a resource person from the journalist community was invited. Inputs were provided on identifying sources of news, gathering information and on conducting interviews. The Khabar Lahariya reporters also learned to write in a "journalistic style". The style of writing changed from being developmental and often didactic to being more factual and crisp. However, over time what emerged as an area that required considerable input was the issue of sources. How does one validate news coming from a village? Have all those who can shed light on a story been spoken to? In order to enable the group to understand this and use this in their newsgathering process a meeting was set up in the middle of the production cycle. Though it was called an editorial meeting, its objective was to get the reporters to share the stories they were working on. Feedback was given in case information gaps existed and suggestions were made regarding other sources they could tap to confirm/ validate facts or then get another view on the matter. The idea was to also encourage the group to ask each other questions on different kinds of news stories and learn from each other. However, feedback from the community proved to be an effective catalyst in the learning graph.

> *A report on a corrupt schoolmaster at Amilihapurva village in the district created a stir in the village and in the Khabar Lahariya group. People in the village had shared information with the Khabar Lahariya reporters on the errant disbursement of scholarship money to Dalit students. According to the people it was the schoolmaster who was responsible for this. A report was written in* Khabar Lahariya *wherein the schoolmaster was held responsible and questioned in the report. This upset the master. He came to the Khabar Lahariya office and questioned the reporters about their sources of information. The women said that the report was based on information from reliable sources and that they could not reveal the names of the people. This upset him even further; he threatened to sit on protest outside the Khabar Lahariya office with the villagers from Amilihapurva. The group was tense. The reporter who got information from the village was questioned by everyone. It was decided that she would go back to the village with another reporter and would ask people to sign on the paper on which their statements had been recorded. This did not happen. The master had already threatened people in the village by saying that he would shut down the school if anyone spoke against him. This time people told the reporters that the master was a good man and that they did not have anything to say against him. The Khabar Lahariya group was tense; people had backtracked. They had not managed to verify the information. We decided that we would speak to the master and ask him to give a statement in writing. The master did so, quite willingly. His statement was included in the next issue of* Khabar Lahariya. *We also discovered that he had distributed the scholarship amount to all the students soon after that.*

The lesson learned from this was that news reports could not be based on information from only one source. Such reports could always be biased in favour of one party and alienate the other. It was therefore important to speak to all the people concerned and include their voices while writing about an incident.

This change in the newspaper did not stop people from threatening or challenging the Khabar Lahariya reporters. A reporter was challenged by her neighbour in Manikpur after a news report appeared in *Khabar Lahariya* on the death of his daughter-in-law under mysterious circumstances. He told her that she too had young daughters and that it could become dangerous for them to venture out alone. When the same reporter wrote about a bank manager who had sexually abused several

women, he offered to buy all copies of *Khabar Lahariya* before they were distributed. The sarpanch (elected representative) of a village came to another reporter's house to ask how they had dared to write about him in *Khabar Lahariya*. The report in *Khabar Lahariya* had suggested that the sarpanch had used the space provided by the gram panchayat for personal use. The Khabar Lahariya reporter told him that a similar report had also appeared in *Dainik Jagaran*, a mainstream newspaper in the region. The pradhan was embarrassed and even asked the reporter for suggestions. She told him to subscribe to *Khabar Lahariya*, which he did quite willingly.

Although the group had become more cautious about its sources of information, it was difficult for people to accept women as reporters and commentators on public issues. The women belonged to the same villages and neighbourhoods. These were poor Dalit and Kol women, who had dared to question those in positions of power. This was different from mainstream journalists, who in most cases were upper caste men from towns and cities, writing about incidents of corruption.

Being Journalists but Women, Dalit and Poor

This section looks at the implications of being female for Khabar Lahariya reporters and the specific ways in which this impacts their work as journalists. There are issues both within and outside the group that define the public domain for them. The manner in which the community or other institutions view them and how Khabar Lahariya journalists desire to be perceived creates a dynamic that pushes the community to forge new boundaries within which to constrain them and generates new ways in which the women envision themselves. Negotiation and contestations are part of this contradictory process. This section also examines the reality of being Dalit and poor for those who seek to be proactively engaged in the arena of information generation and knowledge creation. Critiquing the existing hegemony of the ruling elite in terms of ideas and control over information requires long investments in people that are planned and have a long-term vision.

Looking Within

Khabar Lahariya members who were part of the Mahila Dakiya experience, inherited a basic understanding of gender issues. Mahila Samakhya's work with women had oriented them to look at discrimination in the context of women in concrete ways and this was an area of strength in the group.

From the initial issues itself, *Khabar Lahariya* reports included incidents of harassment for dowry, rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and mental oppression and child sexual abuse. The reports were written with a sensitivity that no other newspaper in the area could claim. Often *Khabar Lahariya* was the only newspaper to report on such cases. Victims of violence and their family members approached the reporters in some cases as they felt that this was a space for redressal of grievances. By reporting on such cases, issues considered to be private became centre stage in the public domain. Such issues generated discussion in various groups. Often the Khabar Lahariya reporters were threatened by the more powerful sections for reporting on such cases.

New situations also emerged within the group as they deepened their understanding in Khabar Lahariya regarding structural factors that create gender-based inequalities in society. Power relationships and oppression within institutions besides the family were questioned. During the production of one issue of *Khabar Lahariya*, a reporter shared her report on a corrupt woman sarpanch. There was divided opinion in the group. Some strongly felt that it was not possible to print anything against a woman, as this would communicate a wrong message to readers. Readers would see this as establishing the myth that women are women's worst enemies. They argued that women had been denied the opportunity to participate in processes of governance. As a result of this, there were few female sarpanches in the area. Writing against one such elected representative would go against other sarpanches as they too would be accused of being corrupt and incompetent. The other group

felt that it was important to write on the issue of corruption. The sarpanch had engaged in an act that was wrong and had misused public money. Such a case could not go unreported. However, *Khabar Lahariya* need not necessarily be insensitive to gender issues by writing against a woman sarpanch. The article could point out the reality that there are very few women sarpanches and they function in an environment that is dominated by men, thereby leaving little space for leverage. The article was finally included in *Khabar Lahariya*.

The newspaper has continued to report on incidents of violence and corruption in which both men and women are found guilty. The abuse of power, both in the domestic as well as the public sphere is seen as a political issue.

External Factors

As the process of getting involved in the public arena started within Khabar Lahariya, the outside world continued to define the group of women reporters in stereotypical ways. The group met the District Magistrate (DM) of Chitrakoot after receiving the Chameli Devi Jain Award for excellence in journalism in 2004. The DM praised the group and its success as a women's collective in the district. He added that it was important for them to register as a Self-Help Group (SHG) and implement government schemes for women. Such schemes, according to the DM, entailed pickle-making and therefore would not be difficult for women to implement. *'Achaar, bari banaanaa to sab mahilaaon ko aataa hii hai. Is mein koii investment nahiin karnaa paregaa.'* The DM also offered to help in every way possible to expedite the process of SHG registration.

As the only women journalists in the area there were also other challenges that Khabar Lahariya reporters face. Their identification with marginalized groups only adds to the assumption that they are not "respectable" women and that their morality is not the same as the upper castes or those who belong to the privileged sections of society. Insensitive behaviour, sexual innuendoes, threats and often sexual harassment were some forms of oppression that they experienced in the public domain. Government departments do not take their requests for information seriously. Often men who provide information ask them for sexual favours. Reporting on a controversial case at times results in threats of abduction and sexual violence. They are asked to provide their sources of information and on their refusal to disclose them, threats to frame defamation charges against them are made.

Mainstream journalists in the area consider them to be a group of "hard working, honest women". In the last three years, there has been slow but grudging acceptance of the fact that as reporters they make the effort to visit remote villages to gather information. In some cases, other reporters have come to the office to gather information from the Khabar Lahariya women. At the same time, it is difficult for them to become part of the all-male, upper-caste male fraternity of journalists as bonding takes place in the evenings, over long conversations and sharing of local gossip.

As men in the same profession, male journalists feel it necessary to patronize the women and "tell them" how to go about news-gathering and what is "appropriate" for them. A journalist working with a local newspaper in the area once came to the Khabar Lahariya office to give them a tip on what he considered a sensational scoop, worth following up. A single woman in the neighbourhood had male visitors who came to her house at odd hours. The local journalist told the Khabar Lahariya reporters to find out more about the woman and her "nocturnal activities". The Khabar Lahariya reporters found this suggestion appalling. They told the man that it was none of his business to tell them what news they should collect and to interfere in the life of any woman. The journalist has not visited the Khabar Lahariya office or given them any suggestions since. Other journalists often ask them why they are not present at a certain press conference or programme organized by the district administration. Invitations to such events sometimes provide local reporters an opportunity to build alliances with the administration, more than report on the event itself. In such a culture, of granting and seeking favours, contacts with the local administration have been tenuous or at the most formal.

Not Just a Women's Paper

In 2003 a survey was conducted by members of Khabar Lahariya and Nirantar in order to get feedback from *Khabar Lahariya's* regular readers. Nirantar, saw the survey as a means to interact with the community regarding their expectations and areas of interest, apart from gauging who was reading the newspaper. The survey findings were to become part of the first annual review and planning meeting. The sample size of the survey was nearly 10 per cent of the total readership, for which a questionnaire was prepared. Readers were asked to respond to the content, language, design and style of *Khabar Lahariya*. The findings of the survey were extremely significant but equally significant was the outcome of this feedback.

- The number of male readers was nearly the same as that of female readers.

- Most readers felt that *Khabar Lahariya* was a newspaper for women as women's issues dominated the newspaper and it was also produced by a group of women. *"Mahilaayen nikaaltii hain isliye un ke mudde hote hain."*

- Nearly 40 per cent of the readers felt that the content of *Khabar Lahariya* did not include public issues. Issues related to developments in the political sphere, local economy, sports never featured in the newspaper.

- Readers felt that the effort to publish *Khabar Lahariya* by a group of rural women was praiseworthy.

The findings of the survey were discussed in the group. The group felt challenged by the comments on the content being limited. They were uncomfortable at being identified as a women's only newspaper as their perception of *Khabar Lahariya* was that it was geared to the community. The group became aware that the news centred primarily on events that took place in villages. Small towns were excluded from their range of concerns. Most of the news stories were micro in nature, their links to larger issues in the district and state were not presented. It was clear that if the readership was to be expanded a shift would have to take place to change *Khabar Lahariya* from a rural newspaper to a local one. The women too would have to get more actively involved in the public arena, educate and inform themselves and engage with such issues on a regular basis.

For Nirantar, an all important objective of bringing out *Khabar Lahariya* was to enable women to comment and critique on aspects that concerned their lives. If women were to engage with the public domain from a position of strength then their learning had to be designed creatively. It was evident that producing *Khabar Lahariya* itself generated live learning situations but this had to be built on and expanded to widen women's horizons of knowledge in a more strategic way. In the group, only one woman had completed twelve years of schooling. The others belonged to families that faced severe constraints of resources and as such knowledge acquisition was a luxury.

As a resource group, we felt that there was a need to take stock of the gaps and limitations that existed and create a space for learning where issues could be discussed and debated in a non-threatening manner. This also meant creating forums of structured learning for the Khabar Lahariya group. As we initiated the process, we realized that the dependency that existed on Nirantar was tremendous.

After the readers' survey and the discussion on the need to make the content more political, the Khabar Lahariya group wanted to write on state level and national level issues. Each month they made several frantic telephone calls before our departure for Chitrakoot. "We want to write about the national budget"... "We want to do a report on the Taj corridor scam"... These were issues on which people had questioned the Khabar Lahariya reporters. We would put together information on these issues from various sources and would share it with the Khabar Lahariya group in a language and style that was simple. An article on the topic would appear in the following issue of *Khabar Lahariya*.

This process was problematic as it created a dependency on us. The group got credit for writing on these issues but it did not build their information base.

> *On our arrival at Chitrakoot for one editorial meeting, we saw leaflets opposing the new tax, VAT, pasted all over the town. Shopkeepers and businessmen who were opposing the tax had pasted these leaflets. Shops and markets were to remain closed as a mark of protest the next day. During the editorial meeting we asked the Khabar Lahariya reporters what the front-page report was. We were told it was mahua (a local seed used to make liquor). There were reports on the rights of the tribal people over mahua (as it was a forest produce) and on the discrimination in daily wages paid to labourers collecting mahua. VAT was nowhere in the picture.*

When we questioned the group they said that they had seen the pamphlets and had also heard people discuss the issue but no one had thought of it as a news item. We questioned them further on why they did not consider this a public issue, one that could feature in Khabar Lahariya. From their responses it was clear that they had not considered the issue to be newsworthy for it was far too complex for them to comprehend and even if they wanted to, they could not write about it. We put together information from various newspapers and shared it with the group. An article on VAT was written in Hindi, as it was based on every piece of information that we shared with the group. Many issues later, VAT appeared in the picture again. The Khabar Lahariya reporters knew this time that it was a tax introduced to curb black marketing by businessmen and shopkeepers and the tax would be levied directly on products for which retailers would have to maintain records.

As resource persons who worked on each issue with the Khabar Lahariya group, we felt that it was important for the reporters to seek information proactively. We introduced tasks for the group and pushed the reporters into doing these. As a first step newspaper reading was introduced as a routine activity in the group. Each reporter had to read the local newspaper every day. The neo-literates in the group faced limitations, as the text was small and the language difficult. Such reporters were encouraged to read the news headlines. They were given individual assignments to upgrade their levels of information. They had to find out about neighbouring districts, states, state capitals, names of ministers and political parties and their leaders. Each reporter had to share the information during the editorial meeting.

The reporters got information from various sources – some consulted activists of another organization, some looked up civics textbooks and others consulted the more informed people in their village or neighbourhood. While this activity was exciting, reading newspapers was not. Mainstream newspapers and magazines assume an information base, which this group of women did not have. However, there was no getting away from this. News items were discussed regularly with members of Nirantar, twice a month. In the process, we were struck by the overwhelming gaps in their knowledge about basic political, administrative, geographical and historical features and structures. The building blocks were not there. How could we hold discussions on the Taj Corridor Scam, a hotly discussed event in their state, if they were unaware of the existence of a central and a state government or the significance of the Taj Mahal, etc? This meant that in a discussion on a news article we would often go back to talking about the partition of India, the freedom struggle or even names of states and countries along with their capital cities. In order to systematize this further, we would prepare one session every month on a particular topic rather than interact only in an open-ended way. Often during such discussions it would be difficult for the women to retain new information, concepts and names. While this was frustrating for us, it was important to provide information several times over as denial in such a forum could be disempowering for the women.

Peer learning in the Khabar Lahariya group was also encouraged as each reporter had different skills. The reporters were encouraged to go in pairs while gathering information on issues that were

new to them. They were also asked to interview local officials and elected representatives at the village level. Issues of governance, state accountability, transparency in the functioning of local officials and representatives were issues that were discussed in depth with them. Nirantar's role in this was to put this local information under scrutiny in terms of its links or contradiction with national or state policy. Programmes and their implementation were discussed after the group had collected information at the local level. The group was encouraged to analyse and comment on these issues.

The first process that enabled the Khabar Lahariya group to reflect on their work and to envision their newspaper differently was the group review that was held in 2003. During this review that was facilitated by members of Nirantar, the Khabar Lahariya reporters provided feedback to each other on skills and competencies and even on inter personal dynamics. The findings of the survey were also analysed and discussed during the review. The group revisited its original objectives during this process. The process of collective reflection was extremely useful in planning the next phase of Khabar Lahariya.

It was also during the review that the Khabar Lahariya reporters interacted with mainstream journalists associated with national dailies. Mainstream journalists shared their concerns regarding the reduced space for reporting on development issues and their opinions on the commercialization of the media. The Khabar Lahariya group shared its own experience of working in challenging conditions as the only group of women journalists and their anxieties about news gathering: "How do you verify the information that you get?", "Do you have to reveal your sources of information?", "Do you get people to sign on the information that they share?" Women journalists from mainstream media also shared some of these concerns. This experience of interacting with other journalists was not only a learning opportunity but also an exciting event for the Khabar Lahariya group. They felt part of a larger community of journalists that shared similar concerns and challenges.

Lok Sabha Elections 2004

In 2004 when the Lok Sabha elections were declared, the political environment was highly charged. Political parties, dormant[8] for a long period, came up with their agendas at the national, state and district levels. Caste-based politics has dominated the political landscape of UP and the political situation in Chitrakoot before the Lok Sabha elections was also ripe with alliances and switchovers taking place in parties along caste lines. Permutations and combinations were made at the local level; politicians were switching parties by the hour; a flaccid administration became highly active; and well established gangs, who often influence the fate of candidates in the region got into action by backing candidates or conferring blessings on them.

While the district was preparing for the grand spectacle of the Lok Sabha elections, the Khabar Lahariya group was doing routine stories. There were the usual reports on violence, development issues and the functioning of the administration. Party politics was an arena into which Khabar Lahariya reporters had never ventured. Reports on political developments at the local or the state level were rare in Khabar Lahariya. Nirantar saw this as a live learning situation in which women could, in a proactive manner, begin to understand local political pushes and pulls. Learning in such a situation would be extremely meaningful for the Khabar Lahariya reporters. However, we also realized that the process demanded extensive support.

We shared the idea of doing three special issues on the Lok Sabha elections with the group. How could they even begin to understand leave alone report on such matters, they asked nervously. It was pointed out that they already had a grasp of local development issues as part of their regular reporting. They needed to link these to or put under scrutiny the promises and claims being made by different candidates.

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[8] Many political parties did not have representatives in the area. Some parties announced their representative only after the declaration of the election dates.

The reporters felt that they needed to have enough information to cover the elections. They had been reading the newspapers but party politics was beyond the range of issues they had engaged in. The newspapers that they had been reading only had abbreviations instead of full names of political parties. NDA, BJP, SP, BSP while they were familiar with *haathi*, *cycle* and *panja* (the election symbols of the three major parties in the area). Though they had cast their vote during previous elections, it was always determined by their family or community. They were dependent on men, who took decisions on the party for whom the family would vote. Voting, around which their engagements centred, was never an independent decision or act for them as citizens.

While the election issues were being planned, questions from readers give a further impetus. A news report on the water crisis in the district featured in *Khabar Lahariya*. The report had information on villages where water sources were non-existent or non-functional. Several people read this report. One reader asked the Khabar Lahariya reporters: "The centre is talking about the feel-good factor. What is your opinion on this? Do you think the report on the water crisis is a comment on feel-good?" The "feel-good factor" was one of the election slogans of the Bharatiya Janata Party(BJP). The slogan was widely used by the BJP in its election propaganda. It was also discussed in various circles in both urban and rural India. Among the Khabar Lahariya reporters there was now a realization that there was no escaping the elections as journalists. Nirantar's role was to first break this down to doable, concrete tasks and generate confidence that we would provide them with the information they required. There was a long discussion after which three areas of reporting were identified:

- Reports, interviews and comments on political parties and local candidates,

- Articles on local development issues with comments on the "progress" in the last five years, responses of the community to the elections and

- Information on the electoral constituency and preparedness of the district administration for the elections.

Learning about these issues acquired a new meaning as the Khabar Lahariya reporters were pushed into political reporting. This also meant that as resource persons we had to provide inputs and this required a tremendous amount of preparation on our part as well. We collected party manifestos, information on candidates in the region and on the electoral constituency. This information was shared with the Khabar Lahariya reporters after which they were encouraged to analyse party agendas and ideologies. Vote-bank politics, divisiveness and factions along caste and religious lines, switchovers made by electoral candidates, the politics of alliances became very real for the Khabar Lahariya group. They were able to relate to what was happening on the larger political front through an understanding of their own region.

Based on this newly acquired information the group was asked to prepare questions for interviewing electoral candidates. These questions were sharpened, reformulated or changed in the larger group. The next task was to interview the candidates. Equipped with a dictaphone, camera and a notebook the reporters went in pairs to meet candidates who in the past had seemed extremely distant and even frightening. While it was not easy for the reporters to get appointments easily, the high levels of excitement resulted in their pursuing the candidates relentlessly for interviews. The responses of the candidates were shared and discussed in the Khabar Lahariya group.

Accessing and interviewing their own representatives gave immense confidence to the Khabar Lahariya reporters. This also meant that they had to keep themselves informed and updated on developments. They followed visits made by state and central ministers during this period. Their speeches were analysed, their promises questioned. The reporters were present at polling booths on election day and where the counting of election results was taking place. As the results were being

declared the mood at Khabar Lahariya was jubilant. The newspaper was ready for production and they had covered diverse aspects of party politics at the local level.

The Lok Sabha elections also raised the issue of citizenship and its meaning for women. Women's status as citizens was non-existent. For the Khabar Lahariya group the idea and concept of citizenship was also alien and abstract. During a discussion on the concept of citizenship, some reporters confided that it was only a term they had heard but never related to in concrete terms. To some Khabar Lahariya reporters, citizenship was a formal notion that they associated with ration cards, election identity cards and other government documents that they possessed. A Khabar Lahariya reporter said during an interaction, *"Main pachiis saalon se vote de rahii huun, mere paas ration card hai, voter pehchaan patra hai aur zamiin kaa pattaa bhii hai, lekin mujhe aaj tak nahiin maluum thaa ki main naagarik huun.'* As passive citizens the only time citizenship was activated was during the elections when women voted. This too was an act performed at the family's insistence. However, during the Lok Sabha elections in 2004 this changed. Most Khabar Lahariya reporters voted for the party of their choice. Issues of caste and religion did not determine their choice of the candidate or the party. Instead it was the party ideology and the image of the candidate as being honest, transparent and secular, that informed their decision. By voting for a candidate of their own choice the reporters also opposed family traditions of voting along caste lines. This created tension within families. However, the sense of voting as an individual in her own right was what mattered the most.

Conclusion

As feminist educators, it is difficult for Nirantar to separate the political from the pedagogical aspects of its work. A key to understanding how this is possible is to turn the gaze upon ourselves. As an education and gender group, the approach to working on these issues is not compartmentalized. For example, engagement with gender is not geared towards how it can contribute to Nirantar's educational strategies. Such an instrumentalist approach, in our view, leads to the development of games, activities, techniques and schedules that do not necessarily translate into encouraging the learner to critically examine her own reality. Therefore, Nirantar's work on gender covers a wider and more holistic engagement with women's issues and their lived realities. Practical and concrete experience of working with women has created abilities amongst facilitators to understand where the learner is located; not to be influenced by "ideal" scenarios or even stereotypes of "victim-hood" or "empowerment", but to engage proactively with the context of the learner. We are aware that to "contextualize" has been used so indiscriminately that it has lost its meaning. Broadly, it translates into being aware of the political, social and cultural marginalizations that groups or individuals experience. As educators, we think this is just the first step, since the role of the educator is one that should enable the learner to move forward to envision a new future rather than just "knowing" about her situation.

Therefore, to contextualize is to perform the task of building knowledge. To facilitate the learner to locate her standpoint in terms of her own experience and relate this to her experience or her external environment of society. This encourages the learner to become a proactive participant in her learning, rather than a passive recipient of information. Respecting the learner's experience, giving her personal voice and helping her to reflect on what it means to know something helps her to create knowledge that is "situated knowledge".[9] This is evident in the manner in which Khabar Lahariya inputs on politics, society and government structures and even geography and history have been located in the emerging needs of the group. The push may come from a question asked of them by someone in the community or it may emerge from their own perception of themselves that they need to be "better informed about". Therefore their need to learn does not emerge only through their interaction with Nirantar.

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[9] Gayle and Green and Coppelia Kahn, 1991.

In this approach, learning opportunities are closely tied to events, work, surveys, reviews and editorial meetings rather than as separate "training modules". The role of the facilitator too varies. For example, in the discussion on whether to write on the corrupt woman sarpanch, the role of the facilitator was limited to raising questions within the group if and when required. However, in the case of the Lok Sabha election the facilitator played a significant role in guiding the group, identifying tasks to be undertaken and laid out the nature of preparations to be done. This, in our view, generates trust in the learner that there is support present when asked for and there is space to articulate what they can take on independently.

Creating a safe space in the learning process is critical to giving voice to the learner and in preparing her to deal with the external world. Trust that information gaps or questions will not become the basis for judgement, but the criterion for what needs to be worked on. There has also been an acute awareness that learning need not be cluttered with information. Judicious use of information is a judgement that can emerge through a good assessment on the part of the facilitator of what is required and what the learner is capable of grasping.

Finally, on the question of citizenship, the understanding that we have reached through this experience is that engendering citizenship is not merely getting women to do what men do in the public arena. It is a continual process of questioning what is seen as the public arena and to recognize that women come into this arena as women and their experiences must inform, recreate and expand the boundaries of how we understand the public.

Inclusion of women does not merely translate to "adding" their voice but to acknowledge that they are different voices. This difference is embedded in power relations, and without questioning and opening up the issue of power, we are in the danger of celebrating it as diversity. A diversity that will never have the power to question the mainstream – in this case our concepts of what being a citizen means to women.

Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme: Strategic Choices For Gender Equity: Interpretations from Sindh Pakistan[1]

Baela Raza Jamil

Basic education is not just an arrangement for training to develop skills (important as that is), it is also a recognition of the nature of the world, with its diversity and richness, and an appreciation of the importance of freedom and reasoning ... The need for that understanding – that vision – has never been stronger.

(Sen 2003: Edinburgh University)

Locating the Setting and Contestations

Pakistan is home to 150 million people, a third of whom live below the poverty line. Women comprise 48.5 per cent of the population. An infant mortality rate of 72.44, maternal mortality rate of 360 to 600 deaths per 100,000 deliveries, malnutrition rate of 50 per cent for children, the majority being girls, with over 50 per cent of the children mentally or physically stunted, are a manifestation of unequal survival parity between girls and boys as well as women and men in an entrenched patriarchal and gender stratified society[2].

These indicators, in turn are linked to women's inequality in terms of access to, and control over, opportunities and resources. Lack of access translates into substantive inequity in social, cultural, political and legal rights. Poverty, exclusion, low education and illiteracy are concurrent realities in urban and rural settlements the world over. South Asia is home to a majority of the poor and the burden of poverty falls disproportionately on women. The adult literacy rate in South Asia is 48 per cent, which is the lowest in the world. Globally South Asia has the largest number of out-of-school children and two-thirds of these are girls. On account of de facto cultural, religious and social biases, women and girls are deprived of investments in improving basic capabilities. The access to political, economic and social opportunities reflected by the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is 0.23 for South Asia, the lowest among all regions of the world (Wijitilleke, 1998).

Education For All (EFA) goals 3, 4, 5 and 6, and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 are a critical challenge in countries such as Pakistan owing to low baseline indicators in literacy and gender. Research undertaken globally indicates that investing in girls' education and women's literacy leads to downstream and upstream externalities, which have multi-sectoral benefits, positively

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[1] This paper is written from an insider-outsider's perspective. The author was associated with the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) and the pre-programme phase of design with the beneficiaries. Since 2000 the author has been an observer to the programme, the analytic placement of facts and outcomes constitute an attempt towards critical research for policy and action.

[2] Implementation Matrix, Pakistan's National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women 2002, draws on all national policies, sector reforms action plans in education, health, access to justice to address gaps in women's access to basic needs (Ministry of Women's Development).

influencing indices on human development, poverty reduction and national productivity. However, an instrumentalist view of the benefits of education and time-bound literacy programmes can at best only lead to trickle-down gains, which in turn are further trimmed within a social fabric governed by functional and customary inequality. Programmes on literacy in general and for women's empowerment in particular await a major upgradation in mainstream social policy to reposition women and gender relations for sustained equity through entitlements.

Women's empowerment has become a contentious area and many argue that empowerment is only a means to the objective of achieving equality for women and men.[3] A growing consensus is emerging to underscore that equity rather than equality is a more appropriate milestone. Equity goes beyond the redistributive measures to transformative ones. It has an absolute core, addresses social asymmetries through public policy and law, and is embedded in quality to address capabilities and entitlements (Ahmed, 2005;[4] Subramanian, 2005; Jamil, 1999; Sen, 1987; 1984 and 1981).[5] It is well recorded that short, extension programmes of education or literacy do not automatically lead to repositioning of women but may simply perpetuate existing hierarchies and the status quo, as well as dichotomous linear relationships of: teacher and learner, men and women, functional literacy and empowerment, often mediated through caste, occupation, class and religion (Wijitilleke, 2001, Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001).

A Note on Terminologies

Gender Parity: An equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled.

Gender Equality: Includes parity but extends to:

• Learning achievement, balance in enrolment in different fields, equality in opportunities for further learning or jobs. Classroom practices, school environment, teacher behaviour. Educational quality is clearly related to equality.*Substantive Equality:* Includes the concept of gender equality but is a more "re-distributive" concept in that it recognizes unequal starting points. It brings into focus the process of getting to formal equality outcomes, including opportunities and treatment, not just the outcomes themselves.*Gender Equity*: Includes parity and equality but is a much more comprehensive concept:

• Embraces a transformative role of education.

• Recognizes gender injustice as part of larger social injustice.

• Requires proactive remedial action.

• Involves both boys and girls.

• Founded on a rights perspective.

(Manzoor Ahmed and Ramya Subrahmanian: UNICEF UNGEI Meeting 2005) [6]

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[3] Research of the Sindh Education Foundation's team on perceptions of 'empowerment' (2000).

[4] According to Manzoor Ahmed, member of the Education Watch 2004 for Bangladesh, Gender Equity is a broader and more comprehensive concept. It emphasizes affirmative action and positive discrimination to compensate for and to break the patterns of overwhelming and pervasive disadvantages. Jamil (1999) unpacks equity through its multi-disciplinary sources in property rights, welfare, justice and basic needs and reconstitutes the concept cumulatively within the social policy and education discourse comprising, access, efficiency, quality and entitlements.

[5] A shift from the Beijing Platform of Action 1995 where equality was the higher ordered goal.

[6] UNICEF UNGEI Meeting 2005 Bangkok: Variations on these exist. For example, UNESCO's Toolkit on Gender Equality defines gender equity as the process of being fair to men and women: "To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent men and women from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a means. Equality and equitable outcomes are the results."

The definition of literacy remains an unsettled area. It has moved from conventional definitions in Pakistan of "one who can read a clear print in any language" (1951), or "one who is able to read and write in some language with understanding" (1972), or "one who can read a newspaper and write a simple letter in any language" (1998), to being globally defined in terms of linked attributes. These are:

1.   A literate person is one who can with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement relevant to his everyday life.

2.   Literacy is not the simple reading of words or a set of associated symbols and sounds, but an act of critical understanding.

3.   Literacy is not an end in itself but a means of personal liberation and development.

4.   A literate person is one who has acquired all the essential knowledge and skills which enable him/ her to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in the home, workplace and his/ her community[7] (2003).

Interpretations of literacy are expanding from a narrow minimalist perspective to multiple literacies, life skills, beyond numeracy and reading with comprehension, embracing the Frierian perspectives of awareness for social change, multiple intelligences, and even post modern positions on non-standardized approaches celebrating oral traditions and mastery (UNESCO 2005, ILO 2003). These interpretations suggest that literacy programmes must carry strategic shifts encompassing empowerment, transformative learning, critical awareness and functional elements related and relevant to well-being and life-coping skills.

Literacy projects and programmes are often charged with the critique of being short-term programmes as a series of mechanical milestones stretching between three to twelve months to inject vocabulary and numeracy skills, complete primers, distribute certificates, stockpile statistics and move on to the next cohort. Some projects may add vocational skills and access to credit to address practical and also strategic gender needs. The shift from disempowerment to empowerment can only be measured if indeed the latter is inherent in the design of the programme, its processes, engaging with the framework of lifelong learning, valuing women's knowledge that preceded literacy programmes and the larger policy environment promoting women's repositioning in society. Very often this is not an intended objective of literacy programmes but only a derivative one. It is therefore critical to examine case studies of programmes that claim to "empower" women. One such programme under examination is the Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme (WLEP) undertaken by the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF).

The paper attempts to deconstruct the substance of the programme processes, outcomes and variances from the original conceptualization. As mentioned earlier, the author was associated with the conceptualization of the programme. The current paper is thus an opportunity to revisit it in its operational context. This is particularly significant in a country where literacy programmes have been at best minimalist and infrequent, amidst urgent calls for gender repositioning. The treatment of the paper is both descriptive and analytical to highlight the process and the need for a more integrated approach to gender and empowerment through literacy.

Sindh is home to 23 per cent of the total population of Pakistan,[8] with 51 per cent being rural. According to the 1998 census, the literacy rate of 10+ population in Sindh was 45.3 per cent. Women's

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[7] Literacy Glossary, Asia/ Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO, Japan, quoted in Aggarwal (2003)

[8] Government of Pakistan Statistics Division (1998) Punjab 55.63, NWFP 12.41, Balochistan 4.96, FATA 2.40 and Islamabad 0.61. http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/pco/statistics/area_pop/area_pop.html

literacy was 34.8 per cent (urban 56.7 per cent and rural 12.2 per cent).[9] According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2004-05 the national literacy rate was 53 per cent and primary gross enrolment rate stands at 84 per cent. Sindh illustrates tremendous disparities in all social and economic indicators. The indicators are skewed on account of its mega metropolis, Karachi. Fifteen million inhabitants out of the total provincial population of 30.4 million live in Karachi. The provincial *mofussal* or hinterland beyond the metropolis is steeped in a homogeneous setting of chronic living traditions of feudal patriarchy, widespread customary practices of *karo kari* (honour killings) and inter-generational patterns of bonded labour. Against this bleak backdrop, Sindh has deep traditions of sustained activism for social and political spaces to advocate reforms and social transformation by a network of human rights and development organizations (HRCP; SPO; NRSP; Banh Behli; SEF; DCHD; IRC).[10]

Sindh Education Foundation (SEF): Home of Innovative Programmes

The Sindh Education Foundation is a semi-autonomous body and its inception in 1992 coincided with the post-Jomtien (1990) initiatives in Pakistan to explore and motivate local communities and the non-state sector to engage with education expansion in both formal and non-formal settings, including literacy and training programmes for the disadvantaged with special emphasis on girls and women. SEF is one of the five Education Foundations set up in each province of Pakistan and federal areas for addressing access and quality across the education spectrum, with a particular focus on basic education. SEF, as a semi-public sector institution, has had a stable and extraordinary leadership since 1993.[11] SEF's leadership is committed to exploring creative and contemporary solutions in education development, envisioning iteratively, revisiting its goal, purpose and milestones since 1997. Its vision is "to empower disadvantaged communities towards social change by creating and facilitating new approaches to learning and education".

Aligned to its vision, SEF has crafted genuine innovative community-based programmes,[12] with adaptations. One such programme is the Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme (WLEP). The Foundation and all its programmes are backed by a culture of conscious exploration, reflection, research, publications and capacity building. Each programme is designed to ensure a comprehensive engagement with both contemporary and indigenized approaches for dynamic change, according to local contexts. SEF has been challenged to address the low state of the education and literacy profile of Sindh through partnerships[13] at multiple levels.

The case study under examination pertains to a programme in the rural areas of Sindh with fishing and some non-fishing agricultural communities. The programme has had three distinct phases:

1. Pre-project

2. Project implementation and

3. Scaling up with revisions (under process).

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[9] Literacy rate for 15+ population was 42 per cent in 2000 (Ministry of Education, UNESCO and JICA). In 2004-05 the literacy rate for 10+ was 54 per cent (male 66 and female 42 per cent).

[10] Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO), Indus Resource Centre (IRC). Democratic Commission for Human Development (DCHD). Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) National Rural Support Programme (NRSP).

[11] This leadership is represented in the person of Professor Anita Ghulam Ali, an eminent education activist.

[12] Fellowship Schools, Community Support Schools (CSS), Adopt a School Programme, Child Labour Education Programme, Strengthening Private Education Initiatives Programme (SPEIP) and WLEP.

[13] Partnerships, as the essence of the EFA movement, have been formalized by SEF with: local communities, local level CBOs, NGOs, local and provincial governments, the private sector and a spectrum of civil society organizations. SEF's work on public-private partnerships is well documented.

An Introduction to the Women's Literacy Empowerment Programme (WLEP)

Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme (WLEP) was an outcome of a process-based design embedded in inclusive research stretched over 15 months.[14] The Sindh Education Foundation (SEF) implemented the programme through 22 Women's Learning and Empowerment Centres (WLECs) in districts Malir and Dadu. The Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) and UNESCO extended it financial and technical support. SEF has also invested its core resources for promotion of youth and adult literacy among women and girls.

District Malir lies adjacent to Karachi by the Arabian Sea. It is inhabited by settler migrants from Balochistan and interior Sindh. Despite its proximity to Karachi, Malir has extremely poor service delivery levels and women's literacy is only 29.77 per cent (SEF Survey 2000). In Dadu, WLECs were set up around the Manchar Lake, in the most deprived area inhabited by one of the oldest communities of the river Indus, the Mohannas, often called the boat people. A majority of them lived on boats until they began facing an ecological disaster. Manchar Lake, once the largest freshwater lake of Asia became highly polluted and the present level of toxic particles in the lake is more than 8000 parts per million (ppm) as compared to the safety levels of 800 ppm (SEF: 1999).[15] The disposal of effluents into Manchar has totally undermined the rights of Pakistan's heritage communities. They have negligible political representation to articulate and secure their reliance on the fresh Manchar water for their habitation, survival, production, reproduction and ecological and socio-cultural systems.

Programme Imperatives of WLEP

The SEF team realized that setting up a women's empowerment programme had many prerequisites. The key ones were equipping themselves with core vocabularies, local contexts and ability to empathize with the communities, without which there would be little value in the programme and its evolution. The capacity building exercise on research and design was undertaken systematically in the pre-project period lasting fifteen months (1999-2000).

Pre-Project Period: Researching and Deconstructing Gender

A project team comprising four members began the programme with an intensive familiarization of gender vocabularies and gender discourse, comparative gender policy frameworks as well as gender initiatives in the region such as Mahila Samakhya (MS)[16] in India. The Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) supported the process-based programme phase and shared comprehensive information on MS for a comparative perspective.

The investigations on gender and its deconstruction along the empowerment continuum[17] in Sindh covered international and national literature reviews, policies and previous experiences of women's literacy programmes, but more importantly, relied on inputs from 32 rural and urban experts in Sindh. These experts were individuals and institutions of local and national stature. A structured indigenous inquiry tapped into institutional and social memories of women and men who had an

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[14] This portion of the pre-project design period was funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE).

[15] SEF: Situation Analysis of Manchar Lake Area: 1999.

[16] The team tried to visit MS in India officially but after 14 months of active pursuit it fell victim to red tape between the two countries. Bureaucratic delays finally made the team abandon the intended visit. MS has coverage of 9,000 villages across 60 districts and 10 states. It is an example of a fully mainstreamed programme for women's empowerment at the level of policy, programmes, strategy, operations and budgets. It has been awarded UNESCO's Noma award for innovations in women's literacy.

[17] "A mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their own affairs." In empowerment we are talking about power that grows from new responsibilities successfully assumed and exercised. (UNESCO Discussion Paper 2005) Empowerment is derived from 'power' expressed as: power over (domination); power to (make decisions); power with (collective position); and power within, comprising self-awareness and assertiveness (Williams et al. 1994).

established reputation in gender activism in Sindh and Pakistan. The diversity of local perspectives enriched and opened up the design possibilities for the team. Whilst *dadi* (granny) Leela from Hyderabad district believed in the primacy of consultation with local people for their real needs, and use of music as a key tool to win the hearts and emotions of local people, Salma Panwar a poet activist, emphasized that change must come from within, and men and women need to work together against feudal colonial laws which undermine women's rights. The more urban functionalist position underscored the need for integrated interventions to cover not just literacy but well-being through economic opportunities, micro-credit, health and reproductive rights as well.

The team imbibed from the lessons learned. Some of the core lessons being that: women tend to resist and underestimate their own empowerment; that empowerment is multi-dimensional; men's domain includes rights and responsibilities, but women are only conscious of responsibilities; women undermine their ability to work collectively as they seek men's approval in communities; these communities suffer extensively from widespread illiteracy, poverty, early marriages, *karo kari* or honour killings, economic dependency and that women are deeply oppressed by emotional and intellectual isolation.

Two strong insights which emerged from the above investigations framed the programme:

- Empowerment of women is not an objective but is in fact a strategy to achieve the objective, i.e. equality or equity of women and men, liberating human relations from the social constructs based on biological interpretations.[18]

- Address and reposition women's equality/ equity in rural and urban communities within the sphere of their operational attitudes and their world view, daily practices, cultural premises, feelings and spirituality. SEF's role must be that of a catalyst.

The SEF's team's own working definition and framework for the programme was articulated as follows:

Empowerment is the process of enhancing possibilities so that people can actively control their own lives and engage in democratic participation within their communities. By women's empowerment we mean to make women aware how to influence and involve their determination over their personal lives.

PRA Tools: Accessing Local Contexts, a Capacity Building Opportunity for SEF

The team's operational mental models were further unpacked through a rigorous exposure to participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools to help them understand beneficiary perspectives and realities.[19] A criteria was developed for selecting the initial villages and communities for application of the conceptual framework and have access to priorities as perceived by the local communities themselves. This criteria for site selection included: a sufficient size of population to ensure availability of sufficient numbers of learners (600-1000 inhabitants) with lower frequency and volume of migration; distance to village to be feasible for regular monitoring (up to 20 kms); willingness and cooperation of the local community and no serious conflicts or clashes within the community; presence of a large number of illiterate households with a strong possibility for the formation of a women's organization; availability of a potential facilitator (education level matriculation); and no other NGO doing similar work as WLEP.

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[18] The women's movement at its deepest level of humanism is about the attempts to convert men, women and social systems to the sense of responsibility, nurturance, openness and rejection of hierarchy that are so embedded in our vision (Sen and Grown, 1985, p. 72). Empowerment is not only about the ability to make choices but also about being able to shape what choices are on offer.

[19] The Department of Community Health, Aga Khan University supported the hands-on capacity building programme on PRA.

The selection of villages (*goths*) was followed by general and more detailed household and community surveys through conventional and non-conventional PRA tools. A range of PRA tools[20] used for accessing community priorities varied according to the objectives, such as gender division of labour; gender relations in target groups in terms of women's and men's access to and control over resources; women's participation in decision-making at the household and community level, etc. The PRA exercises in each village helped the team in social mobilization, striking a basic rapport with local communities and formulating steps for programme enunciation. The tools aided towards an informed design and its implementation.

Programme Goal, Duration and Components

The overarching programme goal was "promotion of literacies as enabling learning skills to achieve human well-being and gender equality in disadvantaged communities". The duration and institutional commitment to the programme was initially for four years (2001-2005). UNESCO supported the implementation with a specific focus on literacy and support materials. However, SEF is committed to the second phase of the programme. The beneficiaries are the fishing and agricultural communities of Manchar and Malir.

Programme components for Phase I entailed material development and adaptation in local language (both literacy and post-literacy) on issues like: health, indigenous practices, child-rearing traditions for local teaching-learning resources; initiating a context-specific organizational structure designed by the women themselves for changing attitudes within local communities/ society; addressing basic needs to improve the living standards of target communities through a multiple literacies approach for promoting social and political awareness through art, music, plays, puppet shows and festivals; capacity building activities for the women's organization members themselves, women's core groups and field staff through linkages with like-minded organizations and generation of quality documentation to influence policy and new programmes for women's empowerment. Material development and group organizations were undertaken as concurrent activities.

The first phase of the programme involved development of literacy and post-literacy materials, including small libraries to suit the local contextual needs of women. Implementation of the literacy programme with local facilitators included enhancing knowledge on numeracy and literacies, spanning health, environment and economic and political issues. Phase one also witnessed the installation of local governments under the devolution programme across Pakistan (2001/ 2). Two of the local women's groups' members were elected as union council councillors. It was the first time that women from these communities came into public office.

Literacy became an entry point. The materials produced in the local language, were gender and context sensitive. A team of experts from Sindh and other provinces was called upon to guide material development[21] in Sindhi for the target groups, to address current gaps in the image of women and girls and their treatment in the texts. The WLEP-SEF team produced a package of three primers/ workbooks for youth and adult literacy and numeracy, entitled *Pribhaat* (Dawn), in collaboration with UNESCO Pakistan. These books conformed to national and international standards of basic literacy texts.[22] *Pirbhaat* was well-received by many organizations and has been reprinted with improvements. Post-literacy materials were sensitively prepared. Readers based on three themes

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[20] Semi-structured interviews/ focused group discussions; seasonal calendar; daily activity profile; time and trend line; social and resource map; village/ neighbourhood map; transect walks; Venn diagrams; wealth-ranking and criteria and wealth-ranking well-being chart; and observation.

[21] Sindh Textbook Board, Non-Formal Directorate of Education in Sindh, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad (AIOU), New Century Education, Reformers, Bahn Behli, ABES and others.

[22] The mathematics primer covers numbers, counting, and basic fundamental operations, measurements and currency concepts. The Sindhi primer deals with phonetics, common vocabulary, language and focused reading and writing. In addition, lessons on awareness raising are included on health and hygiene, social and political, environment, successful household management, projects and initiatives for economic enhancement, and benefits of collective and organized efforts. A large number of illustrations have been in cluded to make the texts attractive. Special care was taken to address learners' (students) psychological needs. Lessons are developed to move from simple to complex learning and comprehension skills. (SEF 2004)

have been prepared ensuring peer and beneficiary reviews. These are on economic enhancement; social awareness and health education.

Reading centres (libraries) have been established in WLECs to cater to the interests and needs of neo-literates, covering a range of subjects: health and hygiene; environment; gender awareness/ women; current affairs and general knowledge; social issues/ community development' cultural, folk or local wisdom; economic enhancement; local skills/ vocational skills; religion and literature/ stories, etc. In addition, the WLECs receive a local language newspaper, *Ibrat* on a weekly basis. Weekly and quarterly magazines by different organizations have also been introduced in WLEC libraries. The teachers and the women's groups called *Goth Nari Sangat* (GNS) have been made responsible for maintenance and proper utilization. The learners may borrow books through an entry/ withdrawal system. The GNS was conceived as a conscious platform for women rooted in indigenous articulations.

Goth Nari Sangat or Village Women's Collective – Indigenizing Group Formation Through Local Vocabularies

Once the programme needs were ascertained, implementation was initiated with group formation. Group formation, in turn was based on vocabularies and images derived from the local context. The core management group was called the Goth Nari Sangat. The initiative was geared towards organizing girls and women living amongst marginalized communities, living on the edge to reposition themselves from being merely conscious of responsibilities to also being aware of rights and possibilities. A collective group, it was surmised, may be able to articulate a process to identify not just obstacles to implementation of the programme and its solutions, but also the sources and structures of power. An intervention around education was not going to be sufficient for empowerment. The process hinged on individual and collective levels of action for responsibility. Inspired by comparative experiences from Mahila Samakhya in India,[23] the WLEP team started formation of indigenized women's groups who could share a common identity and purpose on account of a development programme. The Goth Naari Sangat (GNS) took birth in both clusters on finalization of the surveys of the villages.

The GNS is the nucleus of all WLEP activities. Therefore it preceded all other interventions. Each GNS consists of approximately 100 to 150 *naaris* (members) in a given community, with ten to fifteen small groups within the GNS. The executive body is called (in local language) *sartyoon sath* (SS), which means "group of friends or core group". There have been 162 members of the SS in both district clusters. Each member of the core group is called a *sartee* who is a representative of a *vehro* (courtyard), which is a cluster of ten to twenty households. Members must be from a village and at least 12 years of age. The executive body comprises four office bearers: *sarwan* (leader –president), *soormi* (the bold lady – general secretary), *sayani* (the wise lady – treasurer) and *sughar* (skilled and able person – trained, skilled woman who should receive and facilitate trainings in different skills).

GNS members are the first beneficiaries of all facilities, information and occasions facilitated by the WLEP. To date there have been 4,112 members of GNS (2205 in Sehwan and 1,745 in Malir). The GNS members have preference over others in the selection of learning facilitators or health workers, etc. A candidate from GNS is always encouraged to apply. The GNS representatives of their respective villages are consulted when organizing events and before initiating any activity. Guided by the WLEP field teams, women celebrated almost all the important global events such as International Women's Day, International Literacy Day, etc. Besides providing an opportunity to express their feelings about personal lives, joys and deprivations, these are also occasions to express their innate creativity and emotions. Capacity building of these groups through various training activities has been organized, and includes creating an understanding and a vision of an empowered

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[23] In Mahila Samakhya local terms are: sangha (women's collective), sahyogini (facilitator), mahasangha (a federation of 30-40 sanghas), etc.

woman. In the second phase, GNS will be reinforced with skills for enhancing the group's presence as a formal legal institution.

In addition, these groups play a significant role as Education Committees. They mobilize communities to obtain exposure to education, look after the WLECs and cooperate with the learning facilitators and the WLEP field team. Women are elevated to positions of responsibility in GNS and gain respect in their communities. GNS has emerged as a powerful body with the potential to grow stronger. While many rural poverty reduction initiatives in Pakistan managed by the Rural Support Programmes (RSPs) have group formation as an anchor strategy to mobilize communities for responsibility, contributions and execution for improved service delivery, WLEP's focus has been on recognizing women as catalysts of change and identity formation in their own local communities.

Empowerment for Persevering Identities

In Haji Pir Goth of Malir, women formed their own organizations known as *Goth Naari Sangat* – GNS. This became possible through the efforts of the Women's Literacy and Empowerment Programme (WLEP) field team. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of opportunities for self-development, and lack of basic facilities have rendered the women's lives threefold miserable. Presently, GNS is handling the Women's Learning and Empowerment Centre. In the village, women are helped to learn how to read, write and reflect on their position.

After one month of the formation of the GNS, an NGO arrived in the village with some incentives and recommendations. Health facilities that were not available were promised to the villagers. The community welcomed such an offer and was happy. But that facility was to be provided on the condition that another women's organization would be formed.

Such a demand on the part of that NGO was confusing and disturbing for the community, because they had just completed their GNS formation exercises. Moreover, it was not possible for two organizations to exist and have the same active workers in a small village community ... such activities would divide communities!

GNS conferred with the WLEP field team so as to reach a "suitable" decision. The team advised them to make their own decision keeping in view their best interests and integrity. The matter came to a head and a meeting of the GNS general body was called to resolve issues. With the consensus of all the women it was decided that they would not accede to such demands/ conditions, as they would create more problems than solutions.

Later, a large meeting was held in the village with the NGO in which about 150 GNS members, and some male community members participated. The NGO was informed about the GNS decision. At that, the NGO withdrew from the original demand but asked them to change the "GNS" name as it was in Sindhi and they were Baloch. In response, the GNS president said emphatically, "Although we are Baloch, we understand Sindhi. What is more, we live in Sindh, therefore such issues should not be raised!" The matter ended with that principled and mature response.

During the implementation period (2002-2004) or Phase I of the programme, 22 Women's Learning and Empowerment Centres (WLECs) were established in voluntary locations provided by extremely poor communities, managed by the GNS in 20 village clusters across Malir and Dadu districts. To date there have been 1,200 direct and 21,000 indirect beneficiaries. A basis exists for taking the programme to scale, optimizing on women's organizations and linked to larger public sector initiatives of poverty reduction, health and education. Linkages with other local organizations (government and non-government) are encouraged for information, options, access and expanded choices for meeting their basic needs.

Shahul Shows the Way: Spouses Acknowledge and Imbibe Change

Shahul, a learner at the Women's Learning and Empowerment Centre, Imam Ali Dal village, is about to complete the Basic Literacy Course. She too faces multiple problems of endless household chores, long working hours, low perception of women's education and lack of time to rest and restore her energies. Nevertheless, she seems determined and continues to pursue her studies. Shahul is keen to learn and most of the learning is put to good use. As a result, she works efficiently, and has acquired social graces quicker than her other colleagues.

One day Shahul found her husband taking out her books from her Learning Kit. She got scared and rushed forward to save her books, as she feared he would tear them up and throw them away. She grabbed the books and asked, "Why are you taking my books?" Her husband was surprised, because he did not know that Shahul was watching. But on realizing that he had no choice except to explain, he said, "Shahul, you should be happy to know that I have been studying the books from your bag when I am in the guestroom outside your quarters, because I found a big change in your attitude and management of the house. I want to be educated so that together we may build a future for our family." (SEF: Case studies from WLEP)

Leader Behind the Veil: Goth Dilawar Khan Jatoi

Family feuds, financial crisis and lack of motivation describe the situation in our lower income groups. Is any one trying to pull them out of this vicious circle of poverty and distress? "Surely not a girl or woman!" would be the first reaction of our society. Well, think again, because with the help of our literacy and empowerment programme many women have transformed themselves while others have realized their full potential.

Such is the case with Amina, a resident of Dilawar Jatoi. Sudden domestic crisis worked as an excuse for her to prove her suppressed abilities. It all started with the death of two of her paternal uncles. It was typically followed by quarrels over inheritance; the result being that Amina's family was given nothing but a small piece of land. Being the sole bread earner and decision-maker of his family, Amina's father tried to make ends meet by revamping a small clothes shop he owned in Sehwan town, but in vain. Instead they were further burdened by debt.

It was then that Amina broke through her social norms and destabilized her family through teamwork, conviction and hope. By utilizing and making productive their only resource, the small agricultural plot, they were able to pay back the debt and earn enough to support their family. Evidently, Amina gained a new position in society. She gained more respect and confidence.

Joining the Women's Literacy and Empowerment Centre further boosted her self-esteem and awareness and polished her leadership qualities. She acquired skills in mathematics, which empowered her in her business. Amina, now President of the GNS, proved to be an independent, reliable and helpful family member. Without her decisions, the family may not have survived. She is an inspirational model for all women facing similar barriers.

Learning from WLEP: From Constraints to Possibilities

SEF's team has regularly reflected on the programme goal, matched against activities as part of its quarterly and annual reviews. As early as 2002, SEF's team discussion recorded their concern that literacy alone would not guarantee empowerment. It was envisaged that over a four-year period the literacy centres will evolve as spaces for women to meet and collectively identify, discuss, plan and initiate change, to address gender-related and communal concerns. WLECs would then become formal

literacy centres, shops for trade and crafts, bigger CBOs or community centres (SEF: 2002). Since 2004 there is a concern that the programme's energy needs to be reinvigorated for strategic outcomes as envisaged in 2002. They identified several constraints. The constraints include the level of variance between the original programme design, goal and the actual, pragmatic compromises in implementation, the physical location, facilities and availability of materials and strategic institutional linkages.

For SEF, though the initial impetus for WLEP was a demand side need, ironically its delivery became biased as a supply side programme determined by the donor (focusing on the literacy programme). It could not always focus on the concurrent needs of women on livelihood, health and education. Moreover the prevailing poverty affecting over 50 per cent of the households, pushed the communities towards material acquisitions and short-term benefits. There has been an urgency expressed by the communities for alternative means of livelihood and skills along with basic literacy and numeracy (Khilji, 2002). Amidst poverty and pressing needs for survival, the community mobilization process has been time consuming for the team, negotiating local conflicts, divisiveness as well as inertia. The activists from SEF have been confronted by the constraints of social norms and poor infrastructure, which continue to restrict women's mobility and participation at the community level and for outside community activities. A heavy workload on women acts as a deterrent towards sustained high attendance rates and organized activities for their development. Fieldwork, livestock rearing, fetching water and carrying the burden of poverty are daily realities that women bear. Irregularity not only impedes their progress but also makes it difficult for learners to retain previous learning, in spite of flexible timings. Sometimes attendance declined to 40 per cent and the communities decided on morning, post-lunch and evening classes according to their work schedule, which ironically is also illuminative of their motivation and perseverance.

At a practical level a recurring issue has been the non-availability of local teachers even with Grade VIII education, due to insufficient educational opportunities for girls' education in target areas. Restricted group-based activities on account of the restricted size of the WLECs – 16 x 18 feet for an average 30-35 learners per centre has been another area of concern in the empowerment process. The centre needs to be upgraded to an information and resource centre. In Sindh, women consistently cite their lack of access to information as the most serious constraint to their participation as full partners in economic development. A constant flow of information and its updating is required by the GNS.

At a more strategic level one can surmise that an SEF has stopped short of ensuring opportunities for both enhanced capitalization through economic empowerment and a democratic platform beyond WLEC/ WLEP to exercise choices. WLEP has remained insulated from institutional links with the departments of education and literacy at the district and provincial levels. In spite of the presence of all departments in various programme events, and particularly after devolution in 2001, at the district level, there has been no provision for mainstreaming the programme owing to a severe capacity constraint and restricted scale of literacy programmes in Sindh. Although WLEP was consciously set up in villages with home schools, fellowship schools and community-supported schools (CSS), it has not always been optimally linked with other SEF initiatives in basic education and early childhood education, to address multiple integrated needs of highly impoverished communities.

Several of the constraints highlighted have been underscored in various critiques of women's literacy programmes (Subramanyam, 2005 and Wijetilleke, 2003), reinforcing the need to move forward strategically if indeed women and girls in South Asia are to lead the way in reversing the development debacle and achieving the EFA goals and the MDGs. The Steering Committee highlighted their concerns as well. "A woman living in a village without clean drinking water or health facilities cannot even imagine her empowerment without addressing the fundamental needs of her community, her family and the context from where she derives her own identity" – Steering Committee WLEP. This is a critical concern for the next phase of the programme

WLEP has evolved a mechanism of sharing, learning, information dissemination, discussion, recreation and envisaging of a better future, a movement whereby learners who complete a basic literacy course and go on to post-literacy, making room for a new set of learners who are enrolled in their place. A change in attitudes, household management and confidence has appeared, as a result. However, there is much that needs to be redesigned. A midterm evaluation was also conducted in 2002 to inform the SEF team on course corrections (Khilji, 2003)

Sindh Education Foundation is an institution with deep traditions of conscious reflections. They have critically reviewed comprehensive learnings from WLEP collectively articulating possibilities for the programme. Some of these are as follows:

Women's Empowerment Potential: It has been seen that women's organizations can be established successfully even in highly feudal but poor communities as women have a creative sense of accommodating survival. They have the innate capability to change their lives, to collectively discuss their personal and social issues. Women can manage their egos with a natural ability to organize themselves for collective problem solving, and are open to seeking a range of appropriate linkages at the community level.

Integrated Strategic Gender and Practical Needs: Mere educational activities cannot change lives of women unless education is not linked with meeting the basic minimum needs, poverty reduction, health, sanitation, infrastructure and well-being. There is a great demand for primary health care skills. The full potential of the GNS has not been realized as they need management training, problem-solving and conflict resolutions skills. The interim evaluation of the programme suggested that the training materials developed for female councillors in local government would be most helpful for this purpose (Khilji, 2003). Local government at union council and district levels needs to be mobilized for action as they have development resources for meeting basic needs at the village level.

Dimensions of Language and Gender Empowerment: Traditional assumptions need to be shed about language and men's participation. The people and women of Sindh do not simply require Sindhi as a language of communication but also Urdu and English without undermining identity issues if other language acquisitions enrich Sindhi. Similarly, men are ready to participate in GNS meetings for collaborative understanding of problems and their solutions and they need to be tapped for socio-cultural shifts and for creating the much needed spaces for a gender empowerment, as originally advised by local experts.

Sustainability and Scaling Up

While the programme has broken fresh grounds in approaches to gender and empowerment, SEF has been unable to leverage the learning across Sindh or Pakistan. There have been no sustained efforts to engage actively in policy positions from a comparative perspective, juxtaposing WLEP against other women's literacy programmes in the country or the region. While two GNS members managed to get elected as councillors at the local level, on account of the countrywide devolution, giving 33 per cent seats to women at local levels since 2001, the possibilities for linking and repositioning women have not been factored in for engaging in redistribution and transformation to address substantive equality and equity.

SEF too has a concern that it has not been able to examine concrete options offered by the programme for enabling the women's groups to manage the programme entirely by themselves. Literacies would only be a necessary tool in pursuit of health, livelihoods and transformation. The programme fell short on both redistributive and transformative goals, as the latter has only been measured anecdotally, through case studies. Learners' assessments are albeit more concrete, more powerful tools are needed for measuring outcomes for empowerment. SEF is seeking to harness the

emerging consensus on what is meant by *socio-economic empowerment* and acquisition of increased mastery of their environment.

In a recently written piece by UNESCO[24] the issues have been logically articulated offering necessary directions and steps for consideration within local/ national contexts.

From UNESCO Background and Issues Paper 2005

a. Decentralization for transferring relevant resources and powers, or at least to authorize and tolerate their local accumulation and democratization and

b. Activities or programmes to enable local actors to accumulate and manage their own resources, and then to reinvest ... in improving their circumstances (generally involving capitalization of some type, collective or individual, private or public), *also referred to as entitlements for production possibility by Sen (my addition)*.

> Furthermore it is critical to realize that the new literacy initiatives ... can be one *consequence* of genuine local empowerment ... though, adult literacy is in fact a *necessary element* or *concurrent requisite* for it.

a. There is no effective empowerment without the beneficiary acquisition of management skills, and no acquisition of management competence without literacy and a local system for training;

b. At the same time, there is no sustainable empowerment without accountability, and no accountability without some means for democratizing skills.

> For related reasons, experience suggests that the most effective role for literacy is neither before nor (solely) after effective empowerment activities, but rather right behind the first of them, as an essential supporting condition: call it the principle of "Literacy Second!"

• If literacy comes before resource and authority transfer, there is little field for application of the new knowledge.

• If it does not come until after, there is seldom the local capacity to sustain empowerment or to render the new local authority accountable.

> ... Management cannot be locally mastered or democratically controlled on any durable basis without the support of progressively broadened and deepened literacy (i.e. instruction that reaches progressively larger strata of the population and enables each to go further in their acquisition of knowledge); and literacy instruction is seldom retained without remunerative activities – or at least "solvent" and beneficial ones – to which it can be applied. (UNESCO, 2005)

For SEF it was clear that literacy as originally expressed, is not the only need of the community but certainly a critical step towards learning the vocabularies of dialogue and critical thinking. The communities now require a range of options available to the already established WLECs, for multiple types and levels of capacity building to successfully engage with a transformation agenda crafted at the local level. The agenda needs to take into account concrete measures for decentralization,

capitalization, management skills and democratization for a broader and deepened literacy. A core decision had to be reached by SEF on the women's empowerment programme, whether they should scale up or remaining small as a strategic choice for pursuing gender equity in Pakistan. SEF decided to broaden the scope of WLEP, the decision being a result of a consultative process.

SEF has now decided to enter the second phase of the programme by investing more in upgrading the WLEP model and explore replication in other districts of Sindh to reach a maximum number of underprivileged and underserved communities. This would entail the conversion of the Women's Learning and Empowerment Centres into integrated community development or learning resource centres with infrastructural support, focusing on multiple and lifelong learning needs covering: health and environmental education through training sessions; awareness on legal, socio-political and economic issues; spiritual and emotional development; recreational and art activities; skills upgradation and learning new technologies; development of infrastructure and micro credit.

These WLECs as integrated community learning and resource centres will be set up in a neutral purpose-built location on land donated by the community as information and development centres, through a formal legal process of institutional registration. They will focus on several strategic areas simultaneously. Some of these are: strengthening of women's organizations which are managed by themselves as key decision-makers and aware of their individual and social rights and opportunities; improving the status of women through literacy, income generation, political participation and self-esteem initiatives; development of a local resource pool of knowledge, on crafts, literacies and more; preparation of post-literacy continuing education materials and establishment of libraries in all villages to raise awareness and dissemination of current, general, local and global information.

The newly formed WLECs will be more responsive to demand-driven education opportunities, focusing on English and Urdu as functional languages, other than Sindhi. SEF will develop a user-friendly manual for women's organizations, training and learning facilitators and also integrate linkages with government and non-government organizations as well as the private sector.

Phase II: The Steps Identified

A Women's Literacy and Empowerment Centre will be established through the following steps:

Step 1 : *Need Identification.*

Step 2 : *Meetings with the local community.*

Step 3 : Rapid situation analysis and data collection.

Step 4 : *GNS Executive body formation through social mapping/ vehra (area) distribution. Capacity building of GNS, an ongoing programme.*

Step 5 : Land Identification and MoU signing: Land Identification is primarily the responsibility of GNS, securing the community's willingness to donate through a formal memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the community and SEF explicitly articulating the collective development objectives.

Step 6 : *Participatory budgeting* of the centre both infrastructural/ development and recurrent needs, with mutual understanding of WLEP-SEF.

Step 7 : *Project execution by the GNS.*

The GNS will be registered as Citizen Community Boards (CCBs), a legal community-based organization at the district level. This will help in accessing district development budgets for sustainability and growth as well as help in developing linkages with several government departments,

health, population, social welfare, Pakistan Bait ul Maal (safety nets), education, etc. CCBs thus formed, can benefit women and men by accessing resources from government as well as private sector schemes, relevant support agencies to address livelihoods, literacy, health, basic infrastructure, poverty reduction and self-worth.

Conclusions

The most redeeming feature of the WLEP initiative by SEF has been its decision to scale up the programme but through a strategic shift from being merely a literacy/ gender initiative to one that embraces the challenges of gender equity. Several questions must be raised for the future.

Has the potential implicit in GNS been explored as originally envisaged or is it only a clichéd goalpost? Can it become a rallying platform for debates and public policy action on gender equity for the women of Sindh and Pakistan? Has SEF explored active linkages of WLEP with its other programme options which can affect and leverage households' well-being? Will this programme break out of being a small literacy programme to into one that addresses fundamental issues of gender, livelihood and well-being which can be measured over time?

Pakistan has been involved in various literacy initiatives, which have not been able to convert and scale up since the 1950s. These are: the Village Aid Programme 1958-61; Literacy for Basic Democracies 1964-69; People's Works Programme 1973; National Literacy Programme 1985-86; Iqra Pilot Project 1986; Nai Roshni and Quranic Literacy Projects in 1987 and 1992 respectively, eradication of illiteracy from selected areas like the National Literacy Movement (NLM); Crash Programme in 1998, etc (MoE, 2005). Since 2001 under the EFA 2001-2015 National Plan of Action (NPA), the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2005 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) various programmes are underway, spearheaded by the federal, provincial and districts governments including autonomous bodies like the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), SEF and several NGOs. Literacy programmes thus offer a spectrum of options from the low end three-month programmes of NCHD to long-term ones such as that of the WLEP, exploring women's empowerment and their institutionalization through resource centres, managed by the women's organizations themselves. The original inspiration of WLEP was Mahila Samakhya as a massive countrywide mainstream programme in India. How can this pilot initiative of WLEP reverse the short-term low outputs from previous experiences in literacy, and address strategic equity through integrated women's empowerment programmes, which can be leveraged in Pakistan's public policy fora?

There is an urgency to think beyond education and literacy. Learning solutions to poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods from a gendered perspective lie in multiple domains like agriculture, health, governance, resource conservation, etc. (UNESCO, 2005). Effective literacy programmes can only be in tandem with other sectors and through inter-sectoral collaboration … *"In essence, socio-economic empowerment entails reconnecting the supply side of literacy provision with the demand side of literacy application in the other sectors of local development."* (Ibid). Literacy initiatives need a clustered approach in public policy and financing so that they can be sustained when they are linked to and embedded in measurable initiatives in health, environment, agriculture, education, social protection, poverty reduction, justice systems, etc. On their own, literacy programmes have at best been seen as growth spurts without any sustained medium and long-term backing. To date, barring the initiatives in the province of Punjab[25] and the federal government, there are no consistent allocations for literacy programmes in other provinces and districts. This is an unacceptable and unsustainable reality. Affirmative action for women requires conversion strategies backed by resources.

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[25] The Government of Punjab has been consistently allocating dedicated resources for non-formal education and literacy programmes since 2001. It has recently launched a 100 per cent literacy programme for four districts of the province with a particular focus on women. The Federal Government, through the Ministry of Education, has also been allocating dedicated resources for literacy in the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan 2001-2005, and is ready to respond positively to provincial demands for topping up the budgets. To date, only Punjab has requested for and been provided financial support for development projects in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 budgets.

As Jeejebhoy and Sathar suggest, women's autonomy is not assured merely through education and employment but "requires more comprehensive, direct and context-specific strategies. These include: raising women's gender consciousness, to access community resources and public services, providing support for challenging traditional norms that underlie gender inequities, facilitating acquisition of usable vocational and life skills, enhancing women's access to and control over economic resources." (ibid., p. 709.)

WLEP as a pilot programme in a few extremely poor communities, practically illustrates the need for such strategic actions and the possibilities to engage with parity, equality, substantive equality and equity. It has generated the necessary demand, articulated strategic choices for addressing substantive equality through redistributed opportunities for women. The programme has raised expectations for moving towards an equity agenda and influencing policy on women's empowerment. The response from SEF must positively and urgently be framed around equity, but through an expanded institutional and policy platform intended for scaling up beyond the 20 communities of Manchar and Malir and certainly beyond SEF's own learning.

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Education, Gender and Labour Markets: A South Asian Perspective

Sukti Dasgupta and Rit Chandra

Introduction

Education and work have always been at the centre of theoretical arguments for women's empowerment and social change. It is widely believed that education is strongly related to women's access to good quality work, and contributes to women's empowerment in society.

In the last two decades women's position in the world has witnessed some positive developments. There has been increasing access of women to education as evidenced by the rising female school enrolment rate and also an increasing feminization of the labour force.[1] More and more girls are enrolling in schools than in the past, and more women than ever before have entered the labour force and paid employment. In spite of these developments, much more needs to be done in achieving gender equality in the labour market. Moreover, there are regional differences in terms of these improvements. South Asia, especially, falls behind many other regions of the world in terms of its achievements in gender equality.

The relatively disadvantaged position of women workers in the labour market worldwide can largely be attributed to social perceptions about the roles of women and men.[2] These social perceptions are based on the structured division of labour in society, where men are the "breadwinners" and women the "homemakers". This model still provides the basis of most labour market policies and social protection policies. As a result there are still various restrictions to women's entry into the labour market and into paid employment because it is still widely believed that the "right" place for a woman is within the home.

When women cross these barriers and engage in income-earning activities, mostly at the cost of taking on a "second burden" in addition to their caring functions at home, they are often perceived as being "secondary" workers. Their income is seen as supplementing men's income, because men continue to be looked upon as the primary family "breadwinners". The reality, however, is that women's income is often vital for the family's survival. Worldwide, according to ILO estimations, women are the main source of family income in an estimated 30 per cent of households. In India, according to the latest round of NSSO data, about 10 per cent of all households are "female-headed". However, while women's labour force participation may have increased, the labour market is still highly segregated into "male" jobs and "female" jobs, with earnings and working conditions in the latter often at a disadvantage compared to the former.

Women's disadvantaged position in the labour market is a reflection of the larger unequal status between the sexes in society. Conditioned by deep-rooted perceptions on gender roles, there are various discriminatory practices against women, including unequal access to skill development. Education and training, which define a person's labour market outcome, are therefore largely looked upon as a

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[1] According to "The State of the World's Children 2004", in the 1990s the ratio of girls' gross enrolment rate to boys' in developing countries increased from 0.86 to 0.92.

[2] The problem of gender-based labour market discrimination is a truly global phenomenon according to the ILO in its 2003 report "Time for Equality at Work".

man's prerogative. This gender bias is also reflected in school textbooks with pictures depicting women cooking, cleaning, mothering, etc. In 53 texts examined in Moroccan primary schools, for example, only 9 per cent of the images of women had them working or performing non-traditional activities.[3] Similar statistics have been reported for India by Nambissan (2004).

There is however a progressive realization that these views need to change. Nevertheless, stereotypical perceptions persist. While these gendered perspectives are prevalent all over the world,[4] they appear to be rather pronounced in the South Asian countries. Access and opportunities for women in the labour market in South Asia are strongly conditioned by endemic poverty on the one hand, and the deep-seated gender bias on the other. In a DFID (1997) survey of primary school students in Bangladesh, around 38 per cent of the students (including 33 per cent of the girls) agreed that "girls don't really need to go to school." This gender bias is strongly reflected in the poor nutrition status and poor education status of women and these have a far-reaching effect on women's labour market status. Education, even when made available to girls, is "… primarily influenced by considerations of marriage and 'status production' rather than the need for economic security …"[5]

Education and skill development in particular are the determinants of availability and nature of work. The relatively poor education status of women in South Asia puts them in a disadvantaged situation vis-à-vis men and also explains to a large extent women's lower average earnings and limited occupational choices. Empirical research however, shows that though access to education for women is relatively poor, when women do have education, at least primary education, the returns to women's education in the labour market is higher than the returns to men's education (Unni, 1995). Education therefore is a very powerful instrument for addressing gender-related labour market inequalities. Studies also show that from a purely economic sense as well countries can raise per capita economic growth by 3 percentage points in the next decade if they are able to attain parity in primary enrolment.[6]

This paper examines some of these issues around gender, education and the labour markets in South Asia. In South Asia, it is well-known that women in general tend to be less educated than men. It is also well-known that women in South Asia tend to be more concentrated in poor quality jobs in the agricultural sector and in the informal non-agricultural sector. Further, average earnings for women tend to be lower than that for men. But how do these issues link up? This paper attempts to provide empirical evidence for these established facts from South Asia. In addition, it examines household level data from India to study the trend relation between education and the labour market status of women. The next section provides the argument for the need for education for a better labour market status. This is followed by the third section, which documents the labour market situation of women in South Asia. The fourth section draws on some case studies prepared by the ILO in 2002 in Gujarat to throw some light on this link between social perception, poor educational achievements and poor quality informal work for women. The fifth section draws on NSSO data from India to study the trends in women's progress in the labour market and its links to education. The next section concentrates specifically on the issue of earnings, and whether there is a gender gap in earnings, and quotes recent research that indicates that there is an education premium for women in India. Finally, the conclusion underlines some policy implications in this regard.

Education as the Route to Good Quality Employment

Education is one of the main routes for gender equality in the labour market. Education and training can provide a number of different mechanisms for improving women's position in the labour market and for overcoming the barriers of discrimination and occupational segregation. Education can serve as a route into non-traditional jobs, and out of low paid "female" jobs, which in turn has multiplier

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[3] Advocates for Youth (1995).

[4] A report by Japan's Economic Planning Agency in 1997 summarized that Japanese employment practices discriminated against women, making it difficult for them to take time out to have and raise children.

[5] Nambissan (2004).

[6] Global Campaign for Education (2005), p. 1.

effects for women's families and children. Better qualifications could ensure upward mobility in the job hierarchy, can lead to better earnings, and often better social protection. It also serves as a form of protection against the occupational downgrading of women returning to work after a gap, mainly because of childbirth or child rearing.[7]

The existing gender hierarchies imply however, that in most South Asian countries, male employment and skill formation are given a higher priority. Gross school enrolment rates have increased, but they are still lower for girls than for boys since most families are "… less inclined to invest family resources in the academic success of daughters than sons."[8] Table 1 shows that the lowest gross enrolment rates in the sub-region are found in Pakistan. In Bangladesh the enrolment rate for women has improved considerably since the institution of government scholarships for girl students. Sri Lanka has managed a high degree of success in enrolment with GERs over 110 per cent for both sexes. India has GERs for males at 107 per cent while for girls it is lower, even though the gap in India, as in all other countries in the region, is closing.

Table 1: School Gross Enrolment Rate:[9] South Asia and Selected Countries

Country	1990						2000					
	Men			Women			Men			Women		
	Pri.	Sec.	Tert.	Pri.	Sec.	Tert.	Pri.	Sec.	Tert.	Pri.	Sec.	Tert.
ASIA												
China	129.6	55.3	3.8	120.3	41.7	2.0	117.2	67.7	-	118.5	62.3	-
Thailand	100.2	31.8	-	96.1	29.9	-	98.5	84.8	33.6	94.2	80.7	37.5
Philippines	110.0	69.4	23.0	108.9	72.1	32.7	112.6	73.6	-	112.4	80.7	-
Malaysia	93.8	54.5	7.9	93.6	58.2	7.0	96.7	65.9	25.9	97.1	72.9	28.1
Sri Lanka	115.373	73.7	3.8	110.0	80.0	3.8	113.1	88.7	-	111.7	86.1	-
India	111.4	55.1	7.9	84.7	33.0	4.3	107.4	56.2	12.8	89.6	40.1	8.8
Bangladesh	85.5	26.3	6.6	73.5	13.7	1.3	98.5	45.1	8.5	99.2	47.2	4.6
Pakistan	-	33.6	4.4	-	16.1	2.5	83.7	28.6	3.1	62.0	18.9	2.5
AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA												
Botswana	99.0	35.5	3.3	107.0	39.7	2.8	102.2	70.8	4.3	102.5	75.8	3.9
Ecuador	117.0	-	-	115.9	-	115.7	57.1	-	-	115.6	58.3	-
Brazil	108.4	-	11.0	102.1	-	11.7	155.1	100.3	14.4	146.2	110.5	18.6
Mexico	115.3	53.0	17.5	112.4	53.5	13.0	110.7	71.7	21.1	109.8	75.3	19.8
EUROPE												
Norway	100.5	101.4	38.7	100.4	104.6	45.9	101.4	113.4	55.8	101.5	115.8	84.8
Germany	100.5	99.5	-	101.6	96.9	-	103.5	99.5	49.6	102.9	98.3	47.7

Source: World Bank "GenderStats" Database (http://genderstats.worldbank.org/ home.asp).

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[7] Furthermore, on a macro level, as the primary enrolment rate for girls increases, so too does gross domestic product per capita, UNICEF (2003), p. 18.

[8] Furthermore, on a macro level, as the primary enrolment rate for girls increases, so too does gross domestic product per capita, UNICEF (2003), p. 18.

[9] Mukhopadhyay (1994) in Nambissan (2004).

In spite of these policies with regard to education, a large part of the population in South Asia remains illiterate, with low skilled, or unskilled work as their only option. Again, it is women who are more likely to be illiterate than men,[10] and therefore at a greater disadvantage.

Despite some advances in primary education, at higher levels of education the gender balance still largely favours boys in South Asia. In Delhi University in India, for example, boys far outnumber girls in technical and business-related subjects, while girls are dominant in the humanities and constitute the entire strength of the education degree.[11] This skewed balance is because these technical and business-related subjects are more vocationally-oriented, and within society these subjects and career fields are portrayed as "masculine"[12] in nature, i.e. suitable only for boys and men, while girls are expected to pursue careers in "softer" areas such as teaching, nursing and the like, which also allow them to spend time caring for their families.

Higher education and technical education are particularly important today because South Asia is more and more influenced by globalization and technological changes, which are increasingly shifting the demand towards a skilled workforce. In the formal sector of South Asian countries, the demand for skilled labour has been on the rise – in Pakistan and India. In Bangladesh, the dominance of the ready-made garments (RMG) sector has tilted the balance in favour of low-skilled workers, mainly women, in that sector.[13]

Lack of education also disqualifies many women from enrolling in training courses that have practical relevance. In India, for example, the ITIs impart training in 43 engineering and 24 non-engineering trades. Courses are restricted to high school graduates. While women are indeed moving into non-traditional activities, the pace of the shift is still very slow and labour market segregation is still very marked.[14] This is well demonstrated in the gender profile of the construction sector in India. The construction sector in India is especially important because of its high employment elasticity. While 89.3 per cent of all unskilled workers in that sector are women, less than 10 per cent of the skilled and semi-skilled workers are women.[15] Poor education, which also restricts training and skill formation choices, contribute to vertical and horizontal labour market segregation.

Though women's access to education is certainly improving, the pace of such improvement is slow in South Asia, except for Sri Lanka. Moreover, the nature and pattern of growth, which has been "jobless" in most of the South Asian countries, compounds the already disadvantaged situation of women. While on the one hand, there is marginalization of women from income earning activities, on the other, many poor women in South Asia, who in the absence of any form of social protection, have to work for their and their families' survival, have no option but to engage in work that is often self-created or unpaid family work, unskilled, unsafe and low income.

An Overview of the Labour Market Status of Women in South Asia

The sub-region records some of the lowest LFP rates for women in Asia. While the LFP rate for men hovers around 85 per cent for the subcontinent, there is stark variation in LFP rates for women, with Sri Lanka recording the highest rate at 40 per cent and Pakistan recording the lowest at 16.6 per

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[10] Female and male illiteracy rates are 69 per cent and 50 per cent respectively in Bangladesh; 54 per cent and 31 per cent respectively in India; 71 per cent and 42 per cent respectively in Pakistan; and 11 per cent and 6 per cent respectively in Sri Lanka (Source: UNDP 2003).

[11] Calculated from figures published in HT Horizons (September 14 , 2005).

[12] Nambissan (2004).

[13] ILO (1998), p. 38.

[14] Even in the developed world, the movement of women into non-traditional activities is very slow. According to the 2001 British census, women make up over three-quarters of the employees in personal services, such as hairdressing, secretarial work, etc. Men, on the other hand, make up 91 per cent of skilled trades such as mechanics (BBC World News, 2003).

[15] Anand, Report on Construction Sector Workers, Streetcorner Markets and Micro-Enterprises, p. 30.

cent. It can be argued though, that labour force statistics largely define work in such a way that much of women's unpaid work within the home (other than care work) is not included as work. In Bangladesh, while women's labour force participation rates are still much lower than men's, they have risen because of the huge demand for female employment in the RMG sector.

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rate, South Asia and Selected Countries

Country	Year	Men	Women %	HDI*** %	GEM*** Rank	GDI*** Rank	PPP Rank Male	(US$, 2001)*** Female
ASIA								
China	1995	90.1	80.4	104	-	83	4,825	3,169
Thailand	2000	84.1	69.7	74	55	61	7,975	4,875
Philippines	2001	84.5	54.9	86	35	66	4,829	2,838
Malaysia	2000	83.3	46.7	58	45	53	11,845	5,557
Sri Lanka	2000	80.1	39.9	99	67	80	4,189	2,095
India**	1999/00	88.2	29.0	127	-	103	4,070	1,531
Bangladesh*	1999/00	84.0	23.9	139	59	112	2,044	1,153
Pakistan	2000	85.6	16.6	144	58	120	2,824	909
AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA								
Botswana	1998	71.5	51.4	125	31	101	9,826	5,888
Brazil	2001	84.7	58.4	65	-	58	10,410	4,391
Mexico	2001	85.2	40.4	55	42	52	12,358	4,637
EUROPE								
Norway	2001	84.0	76.4	1	1	1	36,043	23,317
Germany	2001	79.3	63.8	18	8	15	32,557	18,474

Source :ILO 2002-03 Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KLIM), CD-ROM Version.

* Source : Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey, 2002-03.

** Source : Calculated from National Sample Survey Round 55, Employment and Unemployment Data.

*** Source: Human Development Indicators, 2003 (http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/).

However, as Table 2 shows, In South East Asia, the LFP rates for women are much higher, with Malaysia recording 47 per cent, Philippines 55 per cent and Thailand nearly 70 per cent.

Furthermore, in recent years women's LFPR has actually fallen in some South Asian countries, including India. Experts believe that this fall could be because of the way data is collected, but it could also be argued that it is a reflection of the labour market situation in some regions in India where poor women have been crowded out of limited employment opportunities and become what is best known as "discouraged workers", but statistically counted as "inactive".

Even when women are in the labour force, they are more likely to be "seeking work" than being gainfully employed. This is especially true for young women workers. While in Bangladesh and India these rates do not differ significantly between women and men, in Sri Lanka and Pakistan there is a marked gap in the situation between the genders, where around 30 per cent of young women are unemployed (Table 3).

Table 3: Youth Unemployment Rate, South Asia

Country	Year	Men	Women
Bangladesh	2000	11.0%	10.3%
India*	1999/00	10.2%	10.5%
Pakistan	2000	11.0%	29.2%
Sri Lanka	2000	19.9%	30.9%

Source: World Bank "GenderStats" Database (http://genderstats.worldbank.org/home.asp).

* Source: Calculated from National Sample Survey Round 55, Employment & Unemployment Data.

When women are fortunate enough to find work, the existing labour market segregation means that women tend to be engaged in mainly traditional activities in the primary sector, especially low productivity agriculture. Over two-thirds of women in the labour force in the sub-region are employed in the primary sector.[16] Within the primary sector, a large number of women remain "unpaid but contributing family workers" and many others are casual agricultural labour. Where available, the figures show that women's casual employment has increased (only slightly in India, from 22.3 per cent to 22.6 per cent between 1987/88 and 1999/00:[17] and substantially in Bangladesh, from 5.7 per cent to 7.8 per cent between 1995/96 and 1999/00[18]).

However, while women's status as "unpaid but contributing family workers" remains high in all countries of South Asia, the trend shows some differences in different countries. In India, there has been a rise in this category of workers amongst women (from 23.9 per cent to 38.2 per cent between 1987/88 and 1999/00), while in Bangladesh, there has been a fall (from 78.3 per cent to 73.2 per cent between 1995/96 and 1999/00), even though the percentage remains very high. The fall in the case of Bangladesh is again attributed to the rising female labour demand in the RMG sector, so that the previously "unpaid family workers" have moved towards wage employment in the RMG sector.

In some countries, globalization has led to an increase in women's participation in the manufacturing sector. However, as Bannerjee (1997) notes, women's opportunities for employment in the manufacturing sector have fallen drastically in some South Asian countries such as India. On the other hand, women workers are increasingly taking to self-employment, especially in the informal economy. Some are engaged in casual wage work. Amongst the South Asian countries, in Sri Lanka, 22 per cent of women in the labour force engage in manufacturing; this figure does not rise above 11 per cent for the rest of the sub-region, even in Bangladesh despite the huge female labour force in the RMG sector.

Outside the primary sector, women in South Asia are also more likely to be engaged in non-agricultural informal activities which are low income and have no job security, and which is largely

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[16] Female employment in the primary sector (as a percentage of total female employment) is 76.9 per cent in Bangladesh, 72.9 per cent in Pakistan, 65.4 per cent in India, and 48.8 per cent in Sri Lanka (Source: World Bank "GenderStats" Database, (http://genderstats.worldbank.org/home.asp)).

[17] Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India.

[18] ILO (2004), p. 26.

done at home. Where available, the data corroborates this fact. In India, informal employment as a percentage of non-agricultural employment is about 86 per cent for women and 83 per cent for men. In Bangladesh, these percentages are about 74.1 and 90.7 respectively for men and women. Within the informal sector, the following are the activities that women usually engage in:

- *Casual labour, especially in the construction industry*: Women tend to perform the less skilled and less paid casual work. Sometimes when men and women of a family engage in casual construction work, the women workers are not registered as workers. Their output is added to that of their male relatives and their earnings are passed on to the male relatives as well (see Kelles-Vittanen, 1998, p. 120).

- *Self-employed women workers in the informal economy*: They are typically own account workers. Their activities range from agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery and forestry in rural areas, to vending, service work, rag picking, paper recycling and manufacturing in urban areas. Much of this self-employment requires minimal capital investment and a low level of skills, resulting in low earnings. While their employment is not at the mercy of any employer, they have no control over markets and virtually no access to credit and skills that could ensure their continuous employment or upward mobility within self-employment.

- *Domestic workers*: A large number of poorer women in South Asia work as domestic help. These domestic workers work either full-time for one employer, or part-time for several. Child labour is rampant in domestic service. Domestic work is the least regulated of all the informal work. Women as domestic workers often work long hours, with no contracts, no protection against job loss and no leave. Those who live in the employers' houses are on duty all hours of the day.

- *Home workers*: They tend to be the most hidden of all informal employees. According to a survey by the National Institute of Urban Affairs in India (NIUA, 1990), about a quarter of all informal work in India is homework. It can be assumed that reasonably similar proportions exist in other South Asian countries. Amongst the different kinds of work that home workers engage in are making of various food products and pickles, garments, bidi-rolling and filling of capsules with medicines. There is a distinction between homework and self-employment. Though home workers are often classified as self-employed, some home workers are piece rate workers and some are self-employed. Self-employed home workers buy the raw materials from a market, take them home, work on them and finally market their finished products themselves. A businessman or middleman gives piece rate home workers raw materials, which they work on. They then return their produce to the same person and are paid on the basis of their produce. Piece rate home workers are therefore effectively "disguised" wage workers. According to a directive of the Supreme Court of India, piece rate home workers are employees and the direct hold that the middle man or business man has over them qualifies as an "industrial relation" (SEWA, 1987). According to the latest Indian NSSO survey data, there are 30 million home workers in India.

In fact, the relatively disadvantaged situation of women vis-à-vis men in South Asian labour markets is best captured by the wage differential between women and men (Table 4). The wage differential is most stark in Pakistan, where women (in the informal sector) on average earn only 46 per cent of what men earn. The situation is the most favourable in Sri Lanka where women earn around 86 per cent of the income earned by men. In India women earn on the average about 63.7 per cent of men's wages and in Bangladesh, the gap is larger with women earning on the average only about 58 per cent of what men earn.[19].

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[19] Surveys have also indicated that the impact of gender-based wage discrimination is lessened by education. In Indonesia highly educated women earned 88 per cent of the comparable male rate, while less educated women earned only around 70 per cent of the male rate (Manning, 1996).

Table 4: Wage Differential, South Asia

Country	Year	Female Salary as	Source % of Male Salary
Bangladesh	2000	58.20	ILO (2004)
India	1999/00	63.73	Calculated from National Sample Survey Round 55, Employment and Unemployment Data
Pakistan*	2000	46.00	Gennari (2004)
Sri Lanka	1998	85.50	Calculated from SLIS (1999/00)
			in Gunewardena (2005)

* The figure for Pakistan refers only to the informal economy.

Low Education Status and Informal Work

The link between education and the labour market status of women is also demonstrated from a few case studies that were carried out amongst informal women workers in Gujarat in 2002 by the ILO. Most of these women associated their poor labour market status to their lack of education.[20]

I used to attend school with my two brothers, while my elder sister helped my mother to weave saris. My father worked in a mill, but he did not contribute any money to run the household, as he spent most of it on liquor. Since my mother and elder sister could not earn enough to sustain the family, *I gave up my studies and joined them in the weaving trade at the age of 10*. But since the work required me to stand continuously for long hours, and since I was already frail and weak, I started suffering from back pain. My mother therefore taught me to roll bidis. (Mahanandaben, a bidi worker, emphasis added).

My parents, who were engaged in agricultural work in their own fields, sent only their sons to the village school, which was up to Class V. *I wanted to go to school as well, but my parents said, "Girls are not supposed to go to school. They must only do the housework and agricultural work."* I did housework from as far back as I can remember, and when I was ten years old, I also started working with my parents in the fields. I was assigned the task of seeding, cutting and procuring fodder for the cattle. In the morning, I would complete the household chores, and then I would carry lunch to my parents in the fields and work in the fields in the afternoon. (Rajiben, an agricultural worker, emphasis added)

These women regret their lack of proper education. In one way or another, they all attribute their poor economic status and their vulnerable situation to the lack of schooling in their early childhood. They want to make up for their own lack of schooling by educating their children.

One of the major regrets in my life is the fact that I have remained illiterate. I desperately wanted to study. But at a very young age, I started to work. Besides, who would look after the house if I went to school? (Motiben, a datan worker)

One of my sons now studies in Class V and my daughter is in Class III. I am extremely relieved about this. With an education, my children will never starve as I did. And they will be able to read what is written on the Panchayat House wall. (Paluben, an embroidery worker)

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[20] See Dasgupta, 2002.

However, it must be emphasized that the degree of gender disparity varies widely across India. In fact Filmer *et al.* (1998) have shown that the standard deviation for Indian states was almost twice that for the non-South Asian countries. They stated: "India has states with no gender disparity at all (Kerala) and states in which girls are only half as likely to attend school, e.g. Rajasthan."[21]

Can Education Improve Women's Labour Market Choices? Micro-Level Evidence from India

Education obviously has various gains for women, not all of which are related to the labour market. However, as we have discussed earlier, and as other studies have documented, there are substantial benefits of women's education in providing labour market choices for women, and ultimately a better quality employment.

The empirical evidence on women's labour market choice and education however tends to be somewhat inconclusive. There are some studies that actually find a negative relation between women's labour market participation and education (Duraiswamy, 1988, and Nirmal *et al.*, 1992). Others such as Mathur (1994) and Gandhi and Unni (1998) find a U-shaped relation between labour market participation and education. Participation falls till middle-level education and rises thereafter. The explanation for this is in terms of poverty is that poor women, who are also less likely to be educated do not have any option but to remain unemployed, whereas women who are better educated from richer families either do not need to work, or are not allowed to work because of strict gender perceptions in middle class households. However, these are broken down again when women attain a higher level of education.

In this section we use household survey data from India to probe further the previous macro analysis and examine the links between women's labour market status and their educational attainment and to study these trends for India over a period of time.

Table 5 shows the educational status of the labour force in India according to the 1987 and 1999/2000 NSSO surveys. It is clear that while the percentage of women who are illiterate is higher, there has been a fall in the share of the illiterate in the Indian labour force over the time period. In addition, the share of those who are educated above the secondary level has risen for both women and men.

Table 5: Educational Status of Labour Force*, India (1987/88 – 1999/00)

	1987/88		1999/00	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Illiterate	35.0%	71.9%	26.4%	58.7%
Up to Primary	30.0%	14.2%	24.9%	17.7%
Up to Secondary	28.3%	10.0%	31.5%	13.8%
Secondary and Above	6.7%	3.9%	17.2%	9.8%
Total Observations	177,021	61,039	163,392	51,344

* The usual status has been used in calculating the labour force.

Source: Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India.

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[21] Filmer et al. (1998) in Siddhanta and Nandy (2003), p. 13.

Has this somewhat improved access to education for women brought about any change in their occupational status? In other words, is education helping women to shift towards the kind of occupations that were earlier in the male domain? Since education is one of the main factors in occupational segregation – "male jobs" and "female jobs" – to what extent are these stereotypes being broken? On examination of the NSSO data, we find that there have been some changes in women's occupational profile, though this change is still very small.[22]

Table 6: Women as a Percentage of the Employed, in Selected Occupations, India

WOMEN	1999/00	1987/88	
Professional and Technical	29.3%	25.8%	▲
Administrative and Executive	12.0%	9.7%	▲
Clerical and Related	14.0%	10.7%	▲
Sales	10.8%	11.1%	◀▶
Service	29.1%	28.7%	◀▶
Farmers	31.1%	31.1%	◀▶
Production Workers	17.6%	17.8%	◀▶
Transport Equipment Operators	0.6%	0.6%	◀▶
Labourers	13.4%	17.2%	▼

Source: Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India.

The share of women in different occupational groups shows that over the period 1987/88 to 1999/2000, women have indeed increased their share in the top three occupations – professional and technical, administrative and executive, and clerical and related (Table 6).[23] Furthermore, the share of women as production workers or factory workers, another male domain, has also gone up. Interesting, however, is to note the polarization of this change at the top and bottom strata of the occupations. The share of women workers amongst labourers has declined on the whole. But, as noted earlier in this paper, the share of casual labour amongst women workers has risen slightly. The incidence of casual labour amongst women appears to depend strongly on educational attainment. Even a few years of education affects the incidence of casualization substantially. Using data from the 43rd and 55th rounds of the Employment and Unemployment Surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization, India, it can be seen that between 1987/88 and 1999/00, the incidence of casual labour amongst illiterate women increased from 28.2 per cent to 30.7 per cent (rural India), 26.3 per cent to 30.2 per cent (urban India); the corresponding rise for women educated up to primary level was from 17.5 per cent to 19.3 per cent (rural India) and 15.9 per cent to 17.4 per cent (urban India) only.

How this shift in the occupational status of women is shaped by their educational status is also examined. Figure 1, based on data from the NSSO survey in 1987 and 1999/2000 shows that there is a difference in the labour market status between those women who are illiterate and those who have completed secondary education, both within the categories and over that time period. That education has a role in improving labour market status to an extent is fairly evident.

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[22] Meng (1998) also illustrates the case of Hong Kong to reveal that between 1967 and 1987 there was almost no vertical movement in the occupational profile of women in the spinning industry, p. 11.

[23] However it must be remembered that in 1987/88 these occupations (professional and technical, administrative and executive, and clerical and related) accounted for only about 8 per cent of the female labour force, which rose to around 12 per cent by 1999/00.

As noted earlier, amongst illiterate women, there is a clear rise in casualization, as also in unpaid family labour. Illiterate women therefore enter the labour force in India, but remain at the very bottom of the skill and income hierarchy. In fact, the number of illiterate women, both in urban as well as rural India, who were earlier engaged in only domestic work has declined, perhaps because there is need for extra income within the family resulting in the increase in labour force participation of these illiterate women from poor families. It can also be seen that for both survey periods the percentage of women only in domestic work is higher in urban areas. This might indicate either a better economic status for the family (usually post-migration from rural areas), or a "discouraged worker" effect amongst women who either do not have skills required for employment in urban areas, or cannot compete for unskilled/ semi-skilled jobs against men and already-entrenched women. Also important to note here is that the unemployment rate is almost zero for illiterate women. This does not mean that there is enough work for all those who are willing to work, but that those in poor families simply cannot afford to remain unemployed and would therefore engage in any kind of work, some of it self-created, characterized by low productivity, low income and poor employment quality.

Fig. 1 : Usual Status vs Respondent Education (Rural and Urban)
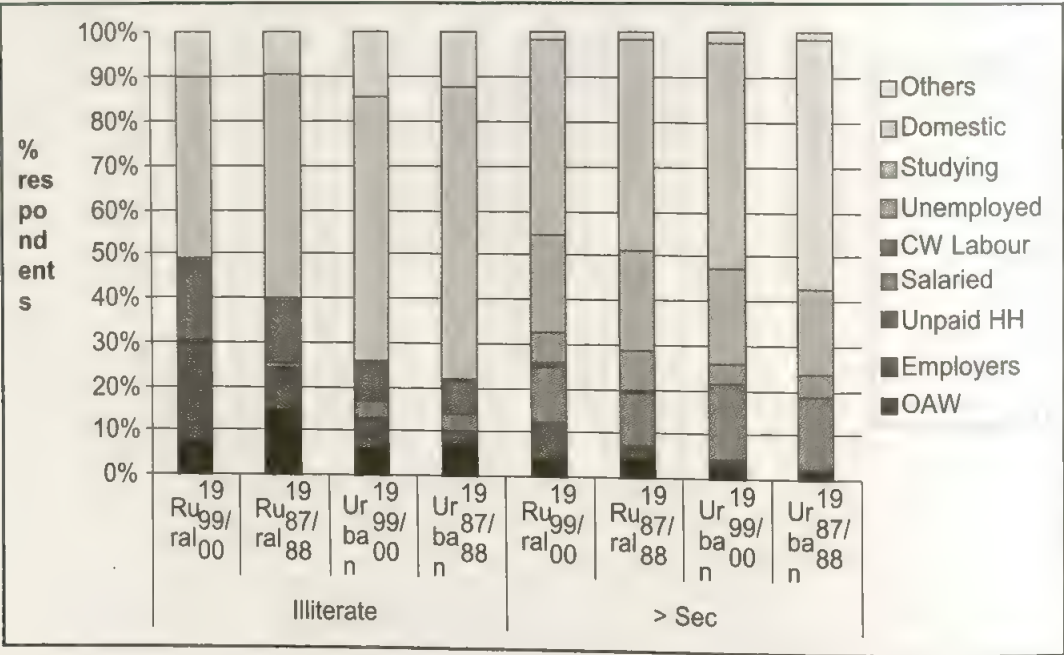
Source: Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India.

Amongst women who have completed secondary education, there are almost none engaged in casual wage jobs, though there is a significant group of those who are unemployed. However the unemployment rate of educated women has declined over the time period (from 31.7 per cent to 26.7 per cent in rural India, and from 19.3 per cent to 18.6 per cent in urban India, between 1987/88 and 1999/00[24]), indicating a rather positive trend. Also the group of wage and salary workers, which is very small amongst illiterate women, is significant but falling in the educated category. On the other hand, the category of women that is increasing amongst those who have completed secondary education is that of students. This implies that more and more women are opting for higher education. In contrast, in urban India, the percentage of respondents in wage employment was relatively steady over the two survey periods, and the magnitude of both unpaid household labour and unemployment
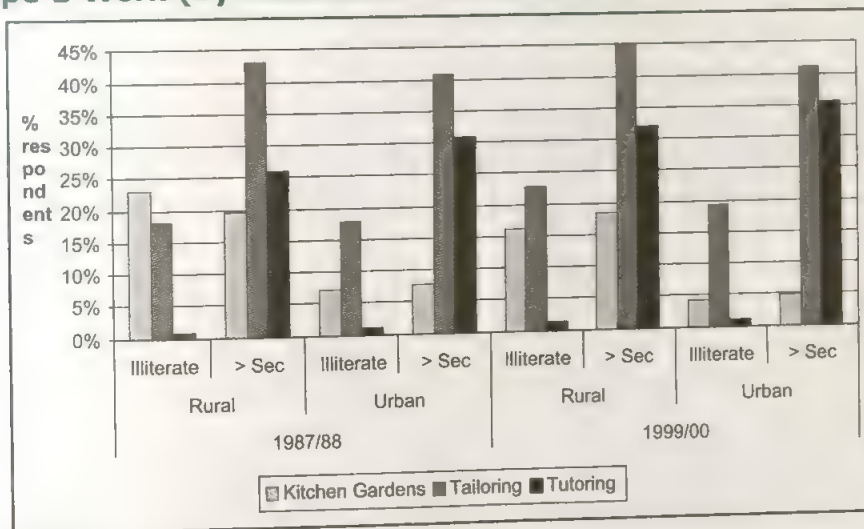
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[24] Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India

is lower than in rural India. This does indicate that a few opportunities exist for educated women in rural India as compared to urban India, and is a definite disincentive towards women's education in rural India, especially beyond the primary level.

Furthermore, the group of women who remain outside the labour market because of domestic duties continues to be very high even for those above secondary level education. This implies that social perceptions of gender roles are still very strong in India, and for the vast majority of women, carrying out domestic duties at home is the most likely option, irrespective of their level of education.

These findings are also corroborated when the percentage of women engaged in different types of activity is examined. If activities are grouped as Type 1, income earning, (see Figure 2a) and Type 2, domestic, outside the house[25] (see Figure 2b), then of the Type 1 activities, those which are also less skilled and manual, such as maintaining kitchen gardens, decline with increasing educational attainment, and skilled activities such as tailoring and tutoring rise with educational attainment.[26]

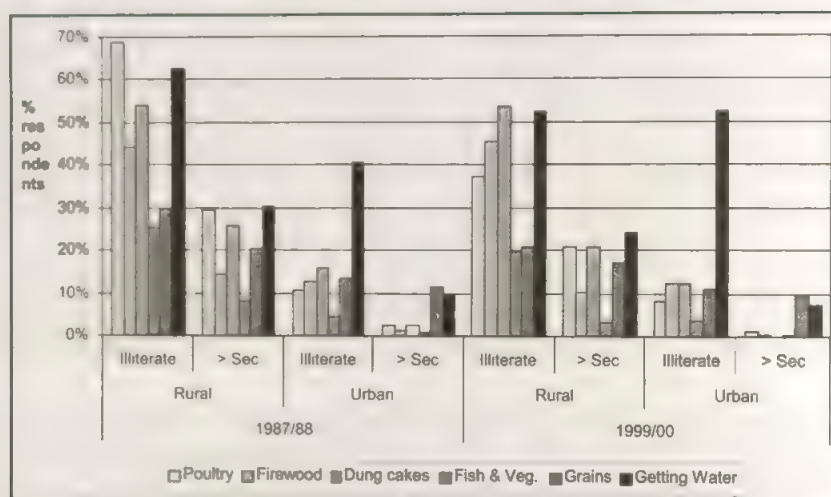## Fig. 2a : Type 1 Work (By Education – Rural and Urban

Source: Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India.

It can also be seen that the percentage of women performing the generally unskilled and labour-intensive Type 2 activities shows a marked and consistent decline both temporally as well as with increasing education levels. Environmental differences between the city and the countryside account for the vastly lower percentages of urban Indian women performing Type 2 activities. However, it can also be seen that higher education leads to far greater declines in the percentage of women performing Type 2 activities in urban areas than in rural areas. This appears to indicate that education, at least in urban areas, is linked far stronger to access to piped water, clean sources of fuel, etc. and economic prosperity (therefore not needing to gather or grow food) than in rural areas. This seems to again point towards poor economic opportunities available in rural areas for educated women, owing to poor infrastructural support, hampering diversification of the rural farm and non-farm economies, which contributes to poor economic opportunities and so on in a circular process.

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[25] Type 1 activities can broadly be defined as activities that require less physical effort and are relatively more skill-intensive as compared to Type 2 activities which require more physical effort and are less skill-intensive.

[26] As can be expected, the incidence of kitchen gardens in urban India is much smaller as compared to rural India given obvious space constraints in cities and towns. Furthermore, better-educated women in urban India possibly find it easier to attract more pupils for tutoring (owing to factors such as more school-going children, due to higher population densities, as well as higher enrolment rates as a result of closer and more convenient schools). Also, given the easier availability of cheap, factory-made garments in cities, the requirement for individual tailoring services is probably less in urban India, which might explain the smaller percentages of urban women opting for tailoring as compared to rural women.

Fig. 2b : Type 2 Work (By Education – Rural and Urban)

Source: Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Surveys Rounds 43 (1987/88) and 55 (1999/00), Government of India.

Education and Its Impact on Women's Wages

One of the main gender-related inequalities in the labour market is the wage differential between women and men. The wage gap could be due to the fact that women-dominated jobs tend to be paid less on the average than male-dominated ones because of their differing skill component. Women, as we discussed earlier, are more likely to be engaged in jobs that require less skills or skills that are relatively easily transferable. However, ILO research has shown that about 10 to 30 per cent of pay differentials between women and men remain unexplained and could be explained simply as a gender gap (Anker 2000).

We find that in India average wages between women (Rs. 393) and men (Rs. 617) indicate a wage gap of Rs. 224 per month,[27] with this gap being higher amongst some groups than amongst others. But is this wage gap because women tend to be engaged in low-income activities or is there any kind of gender gap as well?

The simple question therefore is whether there is some kind of gender-based discrimination in the labour market. To examine this and controlling for other factors, in wages in India, we carried out a regression on an earnings function of the Mincerian type. The estimated equation is as follows:

$$\text{Log W} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ Edu} + \beta_2 \text{ Exp} + \beta_3 \text{ Exp}^2 + \beta_4 \text{ Gender} + \beta_5 \text{ Urban} + \beta_6 \text{ Soc Grp} + h$$

where

- Log W = log of wages
- Edu = years of education
- Exp = experience, for which we have taken a proxy (Age 14) the official age for work in the country (since data on experience was not available).
- Exp^2 = square of the experience term
- Gender = a dummy variable such that it is 1 for women and 0 for men

[27] Calculated from NSSO Employment and Unemployment Survey, Round 55 (1999/00), Government of India. The figure refers to monthly wages (cash and kind) for rural and urban India.

[28] Since data on the number of years of education was not available, proxies were taken with primary education being counted as 5 years of education, secondary education as 10 years and graduate education as 13 years.

- Urban = a dummy variable such that it is 1 for urban areas and 0 otherwise
- Soc Grp = a dummy variable which equals 1 for SC/ ST and OBCs, and 0 otherwise.

The results of the regression (see Table 7) show a reasonably good R square, and the other diagnostics are also satisfied. All the coefficients are statistically significant, and the signs of the coefficients are as expected. Earnings increase with education and with experience, but with experience there is a case of decreasing returns, hence the coefficient of the squared term is negative. Controlling for other factors, those in urban areas are likely to earn more, and those who are SC/ STs are likely to earn less.

This regression also indicates that based on data from household surveys, in India, there is a premium on being a man when it comes to earnings. Controlling for education, experience, urban or rural status, and social category, rate of growth of earnings is likely to decline by 14 per cent if the respondent is a woman rather than a man.

Table 7: Regression Results

Equation: $Log (W) = \alpha + \beta_1 Edu + \beta_2 Exp + \beta_3 Exp^2 + \beta_4 Gender + \beta_5 Urban + \beta_6 Soc Grp + h$

Dependent Variable: $Log (W) = Log$ of Wages of respondent

Independent Variables	Coefficient	T-Statistic
Years of Education[28]	0.367	368.253
Experience	0.530	52.794
Square of Experience	-0.347	-34.527
Gender Dummy (Woman = 1, Man = 0)	-0.142	-49.044
Rural or Urban Dummy (Urban = 1, Rural = 0)	0.137	43.873
Social Group Dummy	-0.079	-25.358
(Hindu SC/ ST/ OBC = 1, All others = 0)		
Adjusted R-square	0.351	
F	7474.646	
Number of Observations	82,960	

While most studies show that earnings differential between women and men have narrowed in the last two decades in most parts of the world, including in South Asia, the gap in earnings amongst women, depending on differential educational and skill backgrounds, have increased. In 1987, the wages of graduate women were 176.6 per cent of wages of illiterate women. In 1999/2000, the relevant percentage is 582 per cent! Therefore, there have been improvements for women in the labour market, but these improvements are limited to educated women. Meanwhile, the difference between women who are highly educated and those who are not, has increased about five times in India.

Research by Unni (1995) and Gandhi and Unni (1998) have however demonstrated that even though there is a gender gap in earnings and women suffer discrimination in the labour market, women's returns to education are significantly higher than men's. Each extra year of schooling raises women's wages (or productivity) by 10 per cent and men's by 8 per cent . Esteve-Volart (2004) also contends that if all Indian states had the female labour market participation of Karnataka, GDP per capita would have been 30 per cent higher over 1961-1991.

Towards Gender Equality in South Asian Labour Markets: Some Policy Implications

At a time when labour markets are becoming more flexible and the global production system requires more and more modern skills, improved access to education and skill remains one of the major means of achieving gender equality in the labour market. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a vast literature exists on the economic benefits of gender parity in education and labour market participation. Researchers like Kanbur and Haddad (1994), Lentican (1996) and Pissani and Zaba amongst others, speak about the cycle of gender parity leading to economic development, which, in turn, reinforces the movement towards gender equality.

In South Asian countries, women have entered paid employment in large numbers, even though as their share in total employment the increase has not been remarkable. Most women continue to be engaged in the agricultural sector and the informal sector, where minimal education or skills are required. Moreover, there has been a rise in casual employment amongst illiterate women. On the other hand, women are increasingly engaged in non-traditional jobs that require substantial education and cognitive skills. In India for example, there has clearly been a shift, albeit a small one, in favour of women in the high-end managerial and technical occupations. The analysis above demonstrates that there have in fact been certain positive changes regarding women's labour market participation, some of which is clearly linked to a better education status for women.

In fact, household-level data from India suggests that the story is as follows: illiterate women are becoming more casual and insecure; women in the middle level of education have entered the labour market in large numbers but there are not enough jobs for them so that they have added to the ranks of the unemployed; and highly educated women are performing better than ever before with their earnings on the average rising to about five times that of the illiterate women. Education is certainly important in improving labour market status, but so far the gender gap is addressed only amongst the group that is highly educated.

The high unemployment rate for middle level (secondary) educated women, especially young women, indeed raises concerns. It points to a mismatch between skills and labour market needs, and it also indicates labour market discrimination against young women. Perhaps secondary-level education for young women needs to be complemented by some relevant vocational training that would enhance employability. Relevant vocational training can widen occupational choices for women for less horizontal and vertical labour market segmentation. What is needed in this context is to revamp the existing training systems in South Asian countries to make them more relevant to women and to the informal sector.

The paper also indicates that gender-based discrimination in the labour market is still very prevalent in India, both in terms of access to jobs and in terms of earnings. On the one hand, it is difficult for women to acquire education and training that enhances their employability. On the other, employers adopt various discriminatory practices against women mainly because of their reproductive and care-giving roles. While we are not aware of such surveys in the subcontinent, a survey conducted in China in 1997 revealed that over 70 per cent of employers questioned said that they would not consider women for employment; and the cost in terms of maternity leave was cited as a major reason.[29]

Using data from the NSSO from India the paper also shows that controlling for education, rural urban status, experience and socio-economic category, women in India are likely to have lower earnings than men, indicating a clear gender gap in earnings, even though in terms of per worker earnings, the gender gap has narrowed between women and men in India. However, research has also shown that returns to education for women in the labour market are significant, and in fact higher than that of men's. This means that if women's education is emphasized, it has the possibility of enhancing women's position in the labour market.

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[29] BBC World News (1997a).

There should be no illusion however, that education for women will definitely lead to employment, unless there is demand for workers with that level of education in the economy and as long as women are looked upon as "unsuitable" and "expensive' because of their care-giving functions within the home. In fact, in such situations education may lead to increased female educated unemployment rate, or higher educated women inactivity rate.

Along with access to education, equally important is society's re-evaluation of women's work, taking into account their unpaid work as care givers at home. When it comes to tackling gender-based discrimination in the labour market, it needs to be placed within the context of gender stereotypes and perceptions of gender roles in society. Changing mindsets in South Asia, to achieve greater gender equality at work and in society in general, remains crucial in this context. This can be achieved partly through education of both women and men, but also through gender-sensitive legislation and sensitization about the sharing of care duties within the home. As long as women are looked upon as "primary care givers" their labour market participation will continue to be crowded in a narrow band of occupations in the informal sector, with low earnings and no security. Education again is an important tool for changing mindsets and stereotypical perceptions about the roles of the genders in society. But education also needs to be imparted in a gender sensitive, flexible and socially relevant manner using both classroom and out-of-classroom strategies.

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Gender, Education and the Labour Market in Sri Lanka

Swarna Jayaweera

Education promotes human capabilities such as knowledge, skills, behaviour, health and economic participation, enlarges people's choices and empowers them to participate in and utilize opportunities to use these capabilities. Education is at the same time a human right that has also been underscored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In the Sri Lankan context, the six decades of positive education policies envisaged goals that often went beyond the international minimalist outlook encapsulated in the Basic Needs approach of the 1970s, the targets of "Education for All" in the 1990s and the Millennium Development Goals stipulated at the turn of the 20th century. Sri Lanka's national policies also aimed at reducing socio-economic inequalities and promoting upward mobility to the highest level of advancement commensurate with abilities and aptitudes. In subsequent decades, however, policy makers tended to be influenced by the human capital theory (e.g. Schultz, 1958) that perceived education almost exclusively in instrumental terms.

This paper seeks to establish that despite the achievement of gender parity in access to education as a consequence of expansionist policies, multiple factors have prevented the majority of women from translating their educational gains into economic rewards through employment. As those who subscribe to social reproduction theories (e.g. P. Bourdieu and J. Passeron, 1977) have argued, education has tended to reinforce inequalities through its inequitable distribution of skills. The paper has three sections: the gender dimensions of education, gender inequalities in the labour market and determinants of the relationship between education and the labour market from a gender perspective.

Gender Dimensions of Education

Policy Trends

The local policy makers in Sri Lanka, during the transition years from the end of direct colonial rule (1930) to political independence in 1948 introduced free primary, secondary and tertiary (including university) education in 1945 as a part of a "package" that also included free health services and subsidized food. The education policy was used purposefully to reduce the gap created largely by the colonial education structure of a limited number of fee-levying urban, English schools and a large number of inferior, free schools in the local languages, (Sessional Paper XXIV of 1943) by establishing Central Schools as "centres of excellence" in rural secondary education. Incentives were introduced in the form of scholarships, subsidized transport to schools and an intermittent provision of midday school meals.

Free education at all levels was an effective agent of reducing poverty and inequalities and promoting gender parity in access to education. There was a rapid expansion of education opportunities in the next two decades (Jayaweera, 1998, 2002). Education expenditure increased to nearly 5 per

cent of GDP by the 1960s. The number of schools almost doubled from 5,726 in 1945 to 9,550 in 1965 and an island-wide network of schools was established, of which 96 per cent were coeducational schools. While just over half the 5-14 age group were enrolled in schools in 1946, educational participation rates rose to 76.7 per cent for boys and 72.0 per cent for girls in 1963, thereby achieving near gender parity. There was a sharp increase in enrolment in secondary schools with the change to the local languages as the medium of instruction from 1953 to 1959, largely in arts streams, and girls constituted nearly 48 per cent of the total enrolment in secondary schools in 1963.

The University of Ceylon, established in 1942 by amalgamating the Medical College and University College of the colonial period, was an elite institution on the Oxbridge model (without its colleges), with 902 students of whom 10.2 per cent only were women students. Free education, the change in the medium of instruction in arts courses, and a liberal policy reflected in the pronouncement that "nothing should be done to deny university education to any student who has the capacity to benefit from it," (Sessional Paper XVI of 1963) led to an inevitable explosion in university enrolment. It reached 14,210 in four universities by the mid-1960s and the percentage of women students increased to 44.5 per cent by the end of the 1960s. By the 1960s, Sri Lanka was recognized as an "outlier" in social policy for achieving a remarkable expansion in educational opportunities in a low-income country in a relatively short number of years.

Policy priorities shifted from the extension of educational opportunities from the late 1960s, stemming from a high incidence of unemployment, an uncritical acceptance of human capital theories by policy makers and the implementation of IMF-sponsored structural adjustment programmes. The consequent reduction in social sector expenditure resulted in the decline in the expenditure on education to 2.3 per cent in the early 1980s. Socio-economic inequalities were reduced earlier but income disparities now widened and escalating costs of living increased poverty and constraints to the utilization of educational opportunities by low-income families. The problem of regional imbalances in the provision of education was expected to be solved by the artificial mechanism of imposing district quotas in admission to universities from the 1970s without reducing inequalities in the provision of secondary education, particularly in science in the districts. Inter-district and intra-district disparities therefore continue to exist. The expansion of secondary education without science education facilities resulted in the rapid increase in the percentage of arts students in universities from 42 per cent in 1942 and 1958 to 70 per cent by 1970 and the concentration of science education in developed districts such as Colombo and Jaffna (in the north).

After a period of stagnation in educational participation and literary levels in the 1980s, international pressures such as the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and endorsement of the goal of "Education for All' in 1990 led to a revival of interest in extending educational opportunities. Free textbooks from Grades I to XI from 1980, free school uniform material from 1993 and school midday meals were provided. However, such policies were juxtaposed with the closure of the small schools that were the avenues to educational opportunities in less developed locations. This was done on the advice of international financial institutions, for reasons of "economic efficiency". It is seen in retrospect that while education was made available to a wider set of socio-economic strata than in many economically developing countries, there are yet significant lacunae that impinge on labour market outcomes.

Access to Education

Sex disaggregated data indicates that gender disparities in participation are minuscule. Male and female age-specific education participation rates of the 5-14 age group were 83.7 per cent and 83.6 per cent respectively in 1981, and are currently around 96 per cent for both girls and boys. It is 97.1 per cent and 95.6 per cent in the 6-10 age group and 93.5 per cent and 96.4 per cent in the 10-14 age group in 2002. Participation rates are slightly higher for girls in the 15-19 age group, as more boys drop out and have easier access to employment than girls (Table 1).

Table 1: Education Participation Rates

Age Group	1963		1981		2001/2002	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
5-9 years	77.6	74.6	84.5	84.2	97.1	95.6
10-14 years	NA	NA	82.9	81.8	93.5	96.4
5-14 years	76.7	72.0	83.7	83.6	92.5	93.5
15-19 years	43.3	36.6	41.2	42.7	59.3	61.4
20-22/ 24 years	5.3	4.0	8.7	9.0	–	–
5-22 years	56.2	51.3	56.0	55.6	–	–

Sources : Census, Department of Census and Statistics 1963, 1981, 2001/2002.

Retention or completion rates are relatively higher among girls although slightly fewer girls than boys enter the school system in Grade I. It is 96.95 per cent for boys and 98.3 per cent for girls at the end of Grade V and 79.1 per cent for boys and 86.3 per cent for girls at the end of Grade IX. The percentage of girls in total enrolment in 2004 was 49.1 per cent in Grades I-V, 50.2 per cent in Grades VI-IX, 50.7 per cent in Grades X-XI and 56.6 per cent in Grades XII-XIII and 50.2 per cent from Grades I-XIII (Figure 1).

Even in the historically disadvantaged plantation sector with its tradition of male dominance, the percentage of girls in schools was 45.9 per cent in 1984 and 48.8 per cent in 1998. Overall dropout rates are higher for boys (3.1 per cent) than for girls (2.2 per cent), although they are higher for girls in plantation and rural Muslim households. In the universities the percentage of women students increased to 53.5 per cent in 2001/2002 (Table 2). More girls than boys are enrolled in the limited number of non-formal literacy centres in the 5-14 age group. **Figure 1**

Percentage of Girls and Boys of Total Enrolment in School : 2004
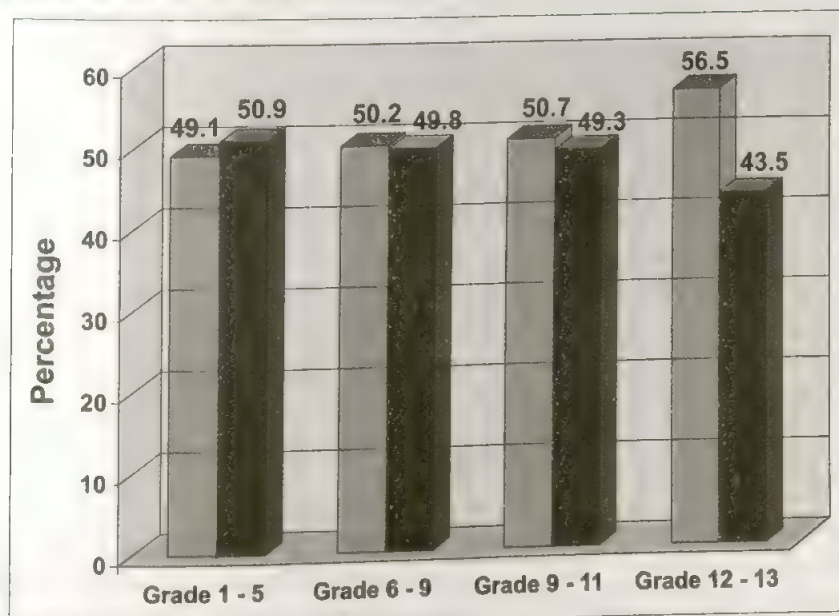
Source: School Census 2002, Ministry of Education.

Table 2: University Enrolment (1942-2002)

| Year	Total	Female	% P
1942	904	91	10.1
1946	1,302	178	13.7
1953	2,392	608	25.4
1959	4,039	949	24.4
1965	14,210	4,579	32.2
1970	11,813	5,243	44.4
1977	14,746	5,796	40.8
1987	29,053	9,661	40.2
1995	36,797	16,719	45.4
2001/2002	58,035	31,052	53.5

Source: University of Ceylon Reports, University Grants Commission.

Parental educational aspirations are high for both girls and boys and micro studies have indicated that parents would not withdraw the girl child rather than the boy child from school in the event of an economic crisis. (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2001a). Performance-wise too, girls have lower repetition rates than boys. Their achievement levels are slightly higher than those of boys at entry level competencies in cognitive tests at primary educational level, the Grade V scholarship examination, secondary school public examinations and university examinations.
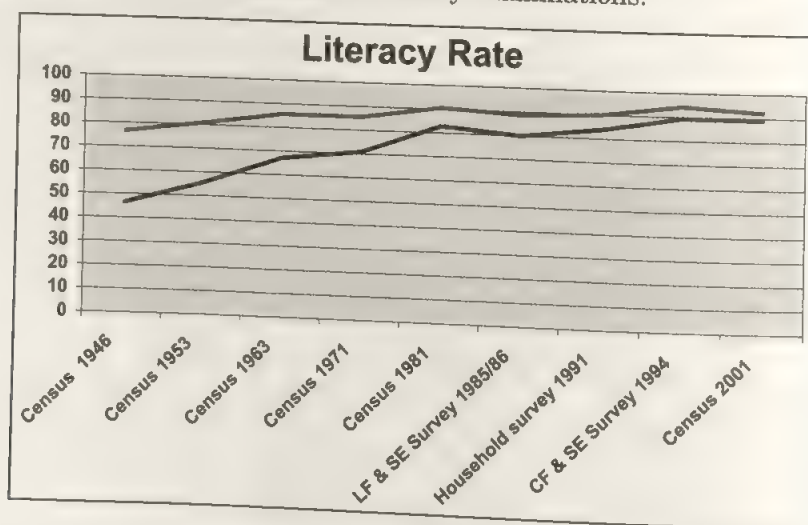
A cumulative impact of the expansion of education opportunities was the rise in literacy levels from 76.2 per cent male literacy and 46.2 per cent female literacy at the 1946 Census to 92.3 per cent and 89.25 per cent respectively at the 2001 Census (Table 3). The gender gap has been reduced from 30 percentage points in 1946 to three percentage points in 2001 (Figure 2.). Urban and rural differences have declined. The female literacy rate is less than 80 per cent only in the plantation district of Nuwara-Eliya. Similarly, female literacy in the most educationally disadvantaged population group (the plantation sector) rose from 45.8 per cent in 1985/86 to 67.3 per cent in 1996/97. Gender differences are minimal in the population below fifty years of age – the post-free education generations – but pockets of female illiteracy exist in the economically productive age groups. The gender gap in non-schooling has declined over the years while there are more women than men with 12 years of education.

Table 3: Literacy by Sector and Sex

	Census 1946	Census 1953	Census 1963	Census 1971	Census 1981 1985/86	LF&SE Survey 1991*	Household survey	Census 2001+
All Island								
Total	62.8	69.0	76.8	78.5	86.5	84.2	86.9	90.7
Male	76.5	80.7	85.6	85.6	90.5	88.6	90.0	92.3
Female	46.2	55.5	67.1	70.9	82.8	80.0	83.8	89.2
Urban								
Total	76.2	82.6	87.7	86.2	93.3	89.1	92.3	NA
Male	84.5	88.5	91.8	90.3	95.3	92.4	94.0	NA
Female	65.7	74.1	82.5	81.5	91.0	86.1	84.3	NA
Rural								
Total	60.1	66.4	70.1	76.2	84.5	84.6	87.1	NA
Male	74.7	79.0	83.9	84.1	89.0	88.5	89.9	NA
Female	43.0	52.4	63.6	67.9	79.9	80.7	84.3	NA
Estate								
Total						59.4	66.1	
Male						74.5	79.0	
Female						45.9	52.8	

* Excludes North and East + excludes North and East except Ampara district.

Source: Census 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971, 198, 20011: Department of Census and Statistics.

Labour Force and Socio-Economic Survey 1985/86: Department of Census and Statistics.

Household Income and Expenditure Survey 1991: Department of Census and Statistics.

CF & SE Survey - Consumer Finances and Socio-Economic Survey 1996/97: Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

However, after six decades of progressive educational policies, universal primary education has been "nearly achieved" only and pockets of educational deprivation exist in low income urban neighbourhoods, remote villages, plantations with their historic educational disadvantage in former colonial enclaves, and recently, in areas affected by two decades of armed ethnic conflict. Only 5 to 6 per cent of secondary schools have science streams in the higher grades (GCE Advanced Level grades) and dropout rates after Grade XI (GCE Ordinary Level) are relatively high. The fourteen universities can still offer places to only 3 per cent of the relevant age group and the absence of adequate alternative opportunities at tertiary levels creates frustration at the end of secondary education.

There is little evidence that the distribution of knowledge and skills has empowered women. The gendered socialization process carried over from the family and society has limited the employment-related aspirations and choices of many girls. Despite a common curriculum in Grades I-XI, 65.7 per cent of the enrolment is in the arts stream in Grades XII-XIII, and only 47.8 per cent in the science stream, while 48.9 per cent were girls in the commerce stream in 2004. The home economics syndrome

still influences the choice of vocational-related optional courses in Grades X and XI. Educational materials continue to reflect gender role stereotypes, and behavioural expectations are for girls to be passive and docile and boys to be aggressive leaders. In university education, women students are poorly represented in engineering and technology courses (Table 4). Neither school nor higher education has attempted consciously to empower women to challenge negative norms and oppressive social practices or to develop their personhood.

Table 4: University Enrolment 2001/ 2002

Academic Stream	2001/ 2002			
	M	F	T	%F
Arts	5,339	11,841	17,180	77.4
Commerce/ Management Studies	5,438	5,440	10,878	50.1
Law	1,464	1,312	2,776	48.4
Science/ IT	5,372	5,029	10,401	48.4
Medicine	2,706	2,406	5,112	47.1
Dental Science	202	232	434	53.5
Veterinary Medicine	183	193	376	51.3
Agriculture	1,118	1,195	2,313	51.7
Engineering and Applied Science	4,065	788	4,843	16.4
Architecture	112	138	250	55.2
Quantity Surveying	124	45	169	26.6
Performing Arts	565	1,931	2,496	77.4
Indigenous Medicine	295	492	787	62.5
Total	26,983	31,052	58,035	53.5

Source: University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka.

Gender Imbalances in Technical and Vocational Education

Gender imbalances are wide in technical and vocational education which is a critical intermediate agency between general education and the labour market. As a sector that received low priority before and after political independence, it has been under resourced and has seen ad hoc development, often creating training agencies to meet immediate pressures from the economic and political environment. Despite considerable donor assistance since the 1980s, its image as a "poor relation" has tended to survive so far.

It is interesting to note in the context of the relationship between education and the labour market that stereotypical choices of courses has resulted in the concentration of women students in culturally ascribed "feminine courses" and in their under representation in technical-related courses at technician and craft or skilled trade levels. In the technical colleges women constituted only about 0.2 per cent of those enrolled in skilled trade courses in 1973 and 0.9 per cent in 2002. While for technical courses 12-14 per cent have been women in recent years. On the other hand, 75-80 per cent of women

students have enrolled in business, secretarial and home economics courses (Table 5). In the centres of the Vocational Training Authority the majority of women trainees were in dress-making, catering and beauty culture courses and recently in computer applications or word processing, and only 1-5 per cent in technical and construction trades (Table 6).

Table 5: Enrolment in Technical Colleges

Skills	1998			2003		
	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F
Technology/ Engineering	2,555	589	23.1	3,780	668	17.7
Industrial Technicians	–	–	–	306	73	23.9
Jewellery Design and Manufacture	55	14	25.9	69	25	36.2
Gem-cutting and Polishing	15	8	53.3	7	4	42.9
Quantity Surveying	577	202	35.0	993	343	34.5
Draughtsmanship	1,001	555	55.4	1,105	585	52.9
Marketing/ Business Studies	501	284	56.7	417	233	55.9
Accounting Technicians	1,412	823	58.3	1,718	1,160	67.5
Secretarial/ Steno/ Typing	1,998	1,898	94.9	1,340	1,310	97.8
Computer Applications	173	102	58.9	130	90	69.2
Public Administration	157	93	59.2	–	–	–
Nursing	56	56	100.0	23	23	100.0
Home Economics	45	45	100.0	–	–	–
Hotel Housekeeping	37	01	2.7	–	–	–
Tailoring	–	–	–	42	13	30.9
Textiles/ Batiks	147	126	85.7	39	35	89.7
Technical Trades	3,206	219	6.8	4,038	36	0.9
Furniture/ Crafts	61	09	14.8	34	2	5.9
Construction	509	36	7.1	621	203	32.7
Agriculture	140	75	53.6	224	113	50.4
English	2,129	1,228	57.7	2,257	1,403	62.2
Japanese	20	12	60.0	21	13	61.9
Total	14,794	6,375	43.1	17,164	6,331	36.9

Source: Department of Technical Education, 1998, 2003.

A similar pattern of distribution of skills is seen in the apprenticeship programmes of NAITA with the majority of women in garments, clerical and domestic service training and 1-5 per cent in technical trades, while the majority of men have been in mechanical, electrical and metal trades, and in the National Youth Service Council training programmes in which no women have been enrolled in technical and construction training programmes. The percentage of women trainees is low in the courses of the Institute of Construction Trades and Development (ICTAD) and even in agricultural courses, while gender-appropriate courses are followed in the programmes of the Department of Small/ Rural Industries. The Farm Women's Agriculture Extension Programme is still trapped in a home economics syndrome (Jayaweera, 2005). At the tertiary level, higher education is almost synonymous with university education. The gender gap in other tertiary-level institutions too is wide, with women concentrated in teacher education, health-related training, law, social work, library science and accountancy, and men in technology and information technology.

Table 6: Vocational Training Centres, Vocational Training Authority (2002)

Activities	National V. T. Centre			District V. T. Centre			Rural V. T. Centre		
	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F	Total	Female	% F
Mechanics	388	10	2.6	368	8	2.2	780	51	6.5
Electrical, Electronic	207	–	–	470	21	4.5	1,465	14	0.9
Metal Work	238	1	0.4	218	–	–	901	36	3.9
Machinist	100	–	–	193	2	.03	–	–	-
Construction	34	1	2.9	90	2	2.2	2,107	87	4.1
Construction Supervisor	13	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Draftsmanship	68	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Gems and Jewellery	46	34	73.9	12	–	–	76	24	31.6
Computer, IT	85	26	30.6	385	208	54.2	1,483	844	56.9
Machinery, Equipment	–	–	–	4	1	25.0	80	–	–
Industrial Management	33	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Nursery Management, Landscaping	8	7	87.5	76	51	67.1	328	153	46.6
Catering	16	14	87.5	–	–	–	372	184	49.5
Bakery, Dairy Products	–	–	–	–	–	–	140	104	74.3

Dress-making, Tailoring	–	–	–	465	291	62.5	7,713	6,041	78.3
Screen Printing	–	–	–	35	22	62.9	143	71	49.7
Handicrafts	–	–	–	–	–	–	113	14	12.4
Leather Products	–	–	–	–	–	–	28	–	–
Beauty Culture	–	–	–	–	–	–	862	829	96.2
Printing Technology	–	–	–	–	–	–	30	–	–
Driving Heavy Vehicles	22	–	–	121	–	–	112	–	–
English Typing	–	–	–	–	–	–	18	14	77.7
Japanese	16	5	31.3	–	–	–	–	–	–
Hair Cutting	–	–	–	–	–	–	56	–	–
Total	1,274	98	7.7	2,437	606	24.9	16,807	8,466	50.4

Source: Based on Statistics, Vocational Training Authority.

The technical-vocational education sector suffers from its traditional isolation from the labour market (with the exception of NAITA programmes) and its products have been disadvantaged by the negative attitude of employers towards these institutions (Kelly and Culler, 1990). Nevertheless they continue to be perceived as an avenue to employment by the non-affluent. Currently efforts are being made to restructure the sector to link it more efficiently with the exit points of the school system and entry to the labour market.

Gender Inequality in the Labour Market

Labour Market Trends

Both supply factors as seen in the earlier section, and demand factors, have influenced women's access to economically rewarding employment. The colonial economy, with its dependence on export or plantation agriculture, neglect of domestic agriculture and local industries, and the expansion of the State bureaucracy to handle public administration, continued to dominate the employment structure in the post-independence decades, with a high premium for state services sector employment. Since the 1950s, irrigation-based land settlements in the dry zone, and capital-intensive and labour-intensive import substitution industries have been promoted in a relatively closed economy. With falling commodity prices, economic growth rates declined from 4.6 per cent in the 1960s to 2.9 per cent in the 1970s, creating a massive unemployment problem. The radical shift in macro economic policy to a market-based liberalized economy in 1977, the implementation of structural adjustment programmes such as the removal of consumer and producer subsidies, the reduction in social sector expenditure and promotion of export-oriented industries, globalization and the accelerated pace of the movement across countries in trade, finances, technology and production, resulted in some structural changes in the economy and in the labour market. Employment rates fluctuated as a consequence of uneven economic growth rates.

The labour market has clearly been the source of poverty and gender inequality. Female labour force participation rates increased in the 1960s with high population growth and rising educational levels, growing faster than the population and male labour force participation. Many young women came out of schools and universities and were employed chiefly in the services sector till the economy could no longer absorb them from the late 1960s. However, in the 1980s, the female labour force participation rates increased by 5.4 per cent and male participation rates by 0.8 per cent on average per year. This rise in female labour force participation rates was at all education levels. Female labour force participation rates reached a peak of 39.4 per cent in 1990 and have since declined and fluctuated around 32 per cent, while male participation rates were relatively stable (Table 7). Women form around one-third of the labour force but it is salutary to note that many women in home-based employment in the informal sector are invisible in these statistics.

Table 7: Labour Force Participation (1946 – 2002)

Year	Male	Female
1946	57.8	18.2
1963	49.8	14.1
1981	49.8	17.1
1990	67.4	39.4
1995	64.4	31.7
2002	67.2	32.5

Source : Census, Department of Census and Statistics 1946, 1963, 1981.

Labour Force Survey Department of Census and Statistics 1990, 1995, 2002.

Two trends in labour force statistics underscore women's unequal access to employment despite their equal access to general education.

High Incidence of Unemployment

The fall in commodity prices in the international market from the late 1950s, the deterioration in the terms of trade and the consequent slow economic growth reduced the capacity of the labour market to absorb the increase in output from schools and universities. This was further fuelled by a relatively high population growth rate of 2.8 per cent in the 1950s and the rapid expansion of educational opportunities. The result was a high incidence of unemployment from the end of the 1960s (Alailima, 1992, 1998), and as Table 8 shows, women have been more vulnerable to unemployment as female unemployment rates have been consistently more than double male unemployment rates since the end of the 1960s, irrespective of whether these rates had increased or declined, as for instance, 8.9 per cent male and 7.6 per cent female unemployment in 1963, 14.3 per cent and 31.1 per cent in 1969, 10.8 per cent and 20.8 per cent in 1985, and 6.0 per cent and 13.5 per cent in 2004.

Table 8: Unemployment in Sri Lanka

Year	Total	Male	Female
1963	7.3	8.9	7.6
1973	24.0	18.9	36.3
1981/82	11.7	7.8	21.3
1990/91	14.0	9.1	23.4
2002	9.8	7.3	14.8
2004	8.5	6.0	13.5

Sources: Census of Ceylon 1963; Dept. of Census and Statistics.

Consumer Finance and Socio-economic Survey 1973, 1981/82 Central Bank.

Labour Force Survey 1990, Dept. of Census and Statistics 2002 (excluding North and Eastern Provinces).

Figure 3: Unemployment Rates: 2002
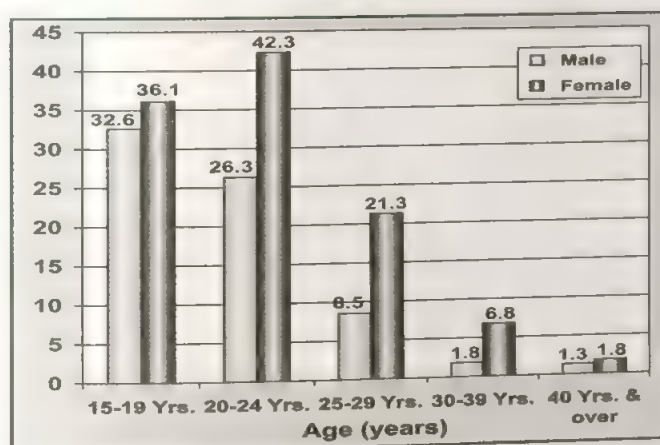
Source: Labour Force Survey, 2002, Department of Census and Statistics.

Sri Lanka's major labour problems have been the high incidence of youth unemployment and educated unemployment, which have created youth unrest in two insurgencies in 1971 and 1987-89 and have accelerated ethnic unrest for two decades. Gender inequality is palpably reflected in the situation that:

1. Female unemployment rates of the 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 age groups have been much higher than male unemployment rates in the same age groups, for instance, 43.6 per cent female unemployment and 22.3 per cent male unemployment in the 20-24 age group in 2002 (Figure 3).

2. Female unemployment rates have been much higher than male unemployment rates at the same level of educational attainment for over three decades and were 23.0 per cent female unemployment and 8.4 per cent male unemployment with GCE O/L attainment and 23.8 per cent female unemployment and 11.2 per cent male unemployment with GCE A/L and higher educational attainment in 2004 (Table 9a and 9b).

A new trend in the survey of 1990 is the emergence of a group of around 18 per cent vocationally trained unemployed (Alailima, 1992).

Table 9 (a): Unemployment Rates by Educational Level and Sex (1981/82)

Level of Education	Male	Female	Total
No Schooling Illiterate	2.1	2.6	2.4
No Schooling Literate	2.4	-	1.9
Primary	3.8	7.8	4.8
Secondary	9.6	33.5	14.6
GCE (O/L)	14.5	42.0	24.5
GCE (A/L)	22.0	52.2	34.8
Undergraduates	42.9	40.0	41.2
Graduates	8.1	12.1	9.7
Other	-	-	-
Total	7.8	21.3	11.7

Source: Report on Consumer Finance and Socio-economic Survey 1981/82 Sri Lanka, Part I, Central Bank of Ceylon (1984).

Table 9 (b): Unemployment Rates by Educational Level and Sex: 2004

Educational Level	TotalRates	MaleRates	FemaleRates
Below Grade 5	1.4	1.3	1.5
Grade 5-10	6.6	5.2	10.8
GCE (O/L) Grade 11-12	14.1	9.4	23.0
GCE A/L Grade 13 Higher Education	17.3	11.9	23.8
Total	8.5	6.0	13.5

Source: Labour Force Surveys 2004, Department of Census and Statistics.

Graduate unemployment in particular has been a major threat to political and social stability for over three decades. Overall graduate unemployment also indicates a wide gender difference: 7.5 per cent male graduate unemployment and 13.2 per cent female graduate unemployment in 1985/86 and 6.9 per cent and 12.2 per cent respectively in 1999. Confined initially to arts graduates of whom the majority have been and are women (SLFUW, 1980: Marga, 1983), a recent study has pointed to unemployment among also high-achieving science, management and commerce graduates in an open economy and the gender differences therein (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2002). State intervention programmes have been implemented since 1971, often on the eve of elections, to contain graduate unemployment. The first programme, the Graduate Training Scheme (1971) gave preference to unemployed male graduates as potential "breadwinners" thus increasing female graduate

unemployment. These programmes: absorption of unemployed graduates as teachers (1976); the Graduates' Placement Scheme (1976-85); unsuccessful efforts to place unemployed graduates in private sector employment (1982); the Graduate Employment Training Scheme (1994); and the ongoing Tharuna Aruna Scheme, since 1997 have been compelled to absorb these unemployed graduates chiefly as teachers or graduate trainees or development assistants in the public service, often on salaries that are below graduate salary scales. That is probably one reason why these have not been gender discriminatory in its absorption.

Demand for Female Labour

The second trend is the deterioration in the quality of employment available to women since the economic reforms of the 1980s. The incremental employment in the 1980s was largely as unpaid family labour in agriculture and casual labour as seen in Table 10.

Table 10: Employment Status (1953-2002)

	Employers		Paid Employees		Own Account Workers		Unpaid Family Labour	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1953	3.7	1.3	59.6	66.9	33.6	18.9	3.3	12.9
1963	2.9	0.5	60.6	82.2	31.3	8.9	4.7	6.7
1971	3.8	0.8	63.7	76.9	28.2	11.2	3.5	11.2
1981	2.4	1.2	62.3	79.4	32.5	12.9	2.8	6.5
1990	2,3	0.6	55.2	55.1	34.6	17.1	7.9	26.5
2002	4.2	0.7	57.7	58.4	33.5	17.9	4.6	23.0

Source: Census, Department of Census and Statistics 1953, 1963, 1971, 1981.

Labour Force Survey Department of Census and Statistics 1990, 2002.

Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Employed by Employment Status and Sex: 2002
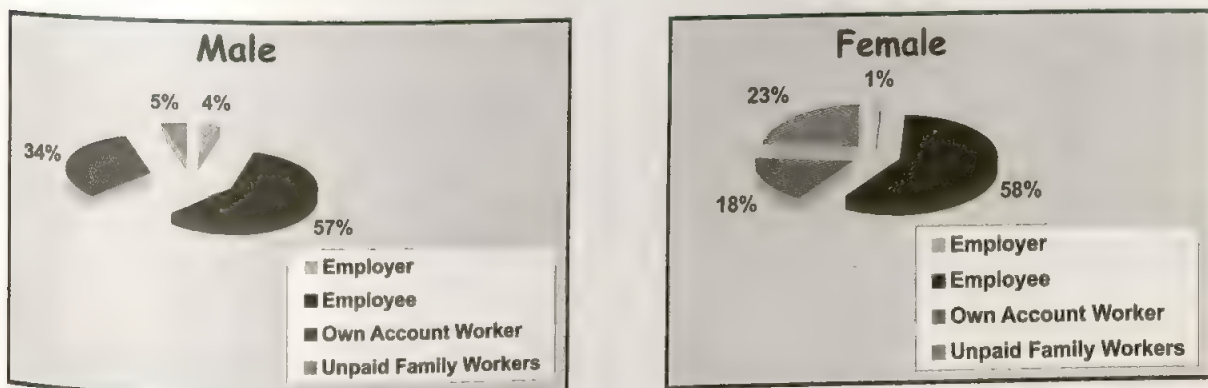
Source: Labour Force Survey, 1Qr. 1999, 2Qr. 2002 (Excluding North and East), Department of Census and Statistics.

The termination of producer subsidies such as in the case of fertilizers under the structural adjustment programme increased the production costs and incomes of small families and the unpaid labour of women in these families was used to adjust to these constraints. Women plantation workers have longer hours of work than men. The collapse of local industries in the open economy affected women more than it did men, as the worst affected was the handloom industry that had been feminized in the 1960s, and few alternatives were available for those who lost their livelihoods.

On the other hand, new employment opportunities were created for women in garment industries in the three Export Processing Zones established in 1978,1985 and 1990 in which around 80 per cent to 90 per cent of the labour force were women, and subsequently in factories in the rural sector and in Industrial Estates in the 1990s. These opportunities were created to harness the benefits of the comparatively low-cost female labour to reduce costs in labour-intensive industries that were relocated in economically developing countries by transnational corporations. While women workers, chiefly in the 18-30 age group, had access to independent cash incomes and thereby to a measure of economic empowerment, their subordinate status relative to men in the employment hierarchy was reinforced in their concentration in semi-skilled work as machine operators while men held most positions in management and technical employment (Table 11). Few avenues to upgrade skills to achieve upward occupational mobility were available. Long working hours, occupational health hazards, low pay and job insecurity in "footloose industries" pointed to economic exploitation in many establishments (Goonetileke, 1987; Weerasinghe, 1984; Cenwor, 1994; Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2002). Currently the end of the Multi Fibre Agreement spells unemployment for many garment workers.

The majority of subcontracted workers in the peripheral or external labour market that expanded to reduce production costs were women who had the opportunity of combining economic and domestic roles in home-based economic activities. However, their piece rate payments were often lower than the basic minimum wage and their income was siphoned off by subcontractors who enjoyed a disproportionate share of the profits (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2001; Jayaweera, 2003).

Table 11: Employment in the Export Processing Zones

Occupational Level	1992			1996		
	Total	Female	%F	Total	Female	%F
Administration	833	216	25.9	3203	841	26.3
Technical Staff - Executive - Non-Executive	725520	13187	18.116.7	19742087	277247	14.0311.80
Supervisory - Technical - Non-Technical	12291970	5111349	41.668.6	30773849	9382212	30.557.5
Clerical and Allied	3587	2076	57.9	6935	3815	55.0
Skilled	11334	6675	58.9	24412	1505	61.9
Semi-Skilled	36578	33209	90.8	60975	52475	86.1
Unskilled	12462	9096	72.9	24140	15580	64.5
Trainees	19137	17068	89.2	28958	23400	80.8
Others	1920	337	17.6	5534	1721	31.1
Total	90295	70755	78.4	165144	116611	70.8

Source: G.C.E.C. Colombo, Board of Investment, Colombo; includes three export processing zones and factories outside Colombo.

The other expanding area of employment has been domestic labour in oil rich countries in West Asia, in newly prosperous countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong, and further afield in Cyprus, and to a lesser extent in Europe. While the "push" factor has been poverty, the demand is largely for low cost female domestic labour and male skilled labour and technical skills as seen in the hierarchic employment structure of migrant workers and in the increase of the percentage of women migrant workers from 0.4 per cent in 1971 to nearly 80 per cent by the mid-1990s (Table 12).

Till the introduction of registration, insurance, training and welfare measures from the mid-1990s, and even subsequently, these women workers who toiled for the survival and upward mobility of their families, have been vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation in their workplaces, and family dislocation at home. A recent phenomenon has been the outflow of garment workers to factories in Mauritius, West Asia and Maldives and their subsequent travails as factories closed with the termination of the Multi Fibre Agreement. Their role as primary income earners has empowered these women workers but the low skills in demand have limited their occupational mobility (Dias and Weerakoon, 1995; Dias and Wanasundara, 2002; Jayaweera, Dias and Wanasundara, 2002; Gambourd, 2001). As only labour sending countries such as Sri Lanka have signed the UN Convention on Migrant Workers, and as a bilateral agreement has been formulated with only one receiving country as yet in 2006, migrant women workers continue to be a vulnerable workforce.

Table 12: Migrant Workers

	1976		1979		1981		1990		1995		2001	
	T	% F	T	% F	T	% F	T	% F	T	%F	T	% F
Professional/ High Level	15	-	1,657	15.1	1,991	13.0	121	5.8	889	49	1,139	6.1
Middle Level	75	-	2,374	16.0	3,420	7.7	848	11.3	7,070	13.3	3,770	15.1
Clerical and Related	-	-	-	-	-	-	828	12.6	-	-	-	-
Skilled	22	-	6,110	1.8	11,187	2.5	11,143	40.5	26,806	27.5	36,702	31.3
Unskilled	214	0.9	12,803	79.1	31,936	76.8	8,862	18.9	23,496	16.7	33,449	23.4
Housemaid	-	-	-	-	-	-	20,823	100.0	114,208	100.0	102,811	100.0
Not Classified		-	2,931	46.7	8,913	54.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	526	0.4	25,875	47.3	57,447	52.5	42,625	63.9	172,467	73.2	183,888	83.8

Source : Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, Ministry of Labour.

In the public service which was a niche for women workers since the 1960s, the percentage of women in the professional and sub-professional labour force increased from 38.7 per cent to 49.6 per cent in 1985/86 and declined to 43.9 per cent in 1994 with the reduction of the public sector and privatization of public enterprises under the "voluntary retirement" and retrenchment schemes implemented since the 1990s as a strategy in structural adjustment. Globalization has increased employment opportunities for women in financial services and telecommunications, but the gender digital divide in the burgeoning area of information technology is very wide (Wanasundara, 2002). The "glass ceiling" has continued to limit women's access to high level decision making positions as the percentage of the female labour force in management positions was 0.4 per cent in 1981 and only 0.8 per cent in 2003 (Labour Force Survey).

The informal sector where the majority of women workers are found is not only outside the ambit of labour legislation but a substantial number of women workers move from one low skill, low income, low status and unstable economic activity to another as self-employed workers or piece rate workers, producing for the "poverty" market.

Gender inequalities are clearly visible therefore in a context in which more women than men were engaged in the less economically rewarding agriculture sector (39.2 per cent of women and 31.65 of men) and the manufacturing sector (24.4 per cent women and 12.9 per cent men) in 2003; the casualization of the labour force seen in the decline in the percentage of paid women employees from 82.2 per cent in 1963 to 55.2 per cent in 1990 (half of whom were casual labour); the increase in the percentage of unpaid family labour from 6.3 per cent in 1963 to 26.5 per cent in 1990 (Table 10); and the concentration of women at the bottom rung of employment. The gender division of labour and occupational overcrowding in specific jobs changed only marginally as women have continued to be concentrated in agriculture, local and assembly line industries, education, health and domestic services, and around 10 per cent or less were engineers or technicians.

While external pressures such as globalization, macro economic policies that did not achieve the expected "trickle down" benefits and the imbalance between the demand for and supply of labour had their impact on employment, these policies and trends were also gender differentiated in processes and outcomes. Gendered norms underpin vocational aspirations, confining women to a narrow range of skills that result in different trajectories of women and men in training, tertiary education and employment. The policy environment and socialization process was not conducive to counter gender biases or discrimination, and education has failed to empower women and to transform societal attitudes to ensure gender equality. Both the vertical and horizontal segmentation of the labour market has been therefore a gendered process.

Gender, Education and Occupational Mobility

As seen in the earlier sections of this paper, education has benefited the majority of women but employment experiences have been a relative failure as many women have not been able to translate their educational gains to economically rewarding employment. In broad terms, there is an education-related pattern of employment. Those with no schooling or with only a primary education are chiefly in the agriculture sector. Secondary school dropouts tend to be blue-collar workers or service workers and a secondary or higher education is required for white-collar workers and the professions. There is, however, no linear relationship between education and employment and the relationship is complex, as labour force participation is not dependent on education, as seen in the example of plantation workers. Those with a complete secondary education and a higher education have been noted to have the highest unemployment rates. Gender-related constraints were seen to have underscored such complexities.

As occupational mobility is a dimension of socio-economic mobility, an attempt will be made to ascertain the extent to which education has promoted upward occupational mobility, using the findings of sample studies conducted over three decades. A related factor is that the incidence of poverty is lowest at 3-4 per cent among those in professional and managerial employment and highest among farmers at 30 per cent and production workers at 28 per cent (Household Income and Expenditure Survey 1995/96). The recent World Bank Survey (2004) indicates that poor households have had almost equal access to primary education as non-poor households (95 per cent and 97 per cent) but that the education gap widens at each level until the non-poor have three times the access of the poor to tertiary education (Figure 5). The poorest therefore do not proceed to senior secondary education and therefore to higher education and remain confined to low skill, low income jobs in the informal sector and therefore cannot even exit poverty. At the same time, men were found to benefit more than women from senior secondary and higher education with respect to access to remunerative employment. **Figure 5**

Poverty and Education: 1995/96
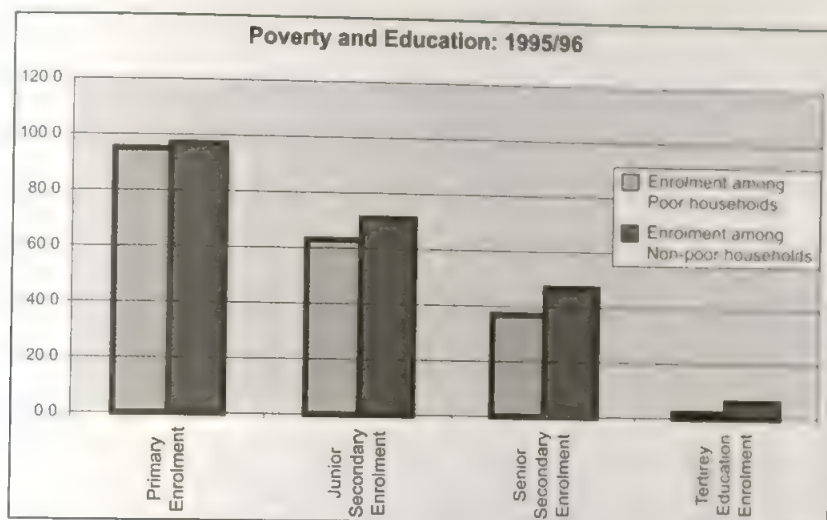
Source: World Bank Education Sector Survey-2004.

These socio-economic and gender-specific determinants of education and employment are seen vividly in intergenerational studies. A three-generational study at the end of the 1980s of grandmother, mother and daughter found that socio-economic differentiation tended to determine the access of women workers to education and employment. Three generations of plantation workers were non-schooled or had only a primary education and were tea pluckers and rubber tappers. In the low income urban neighbourhood, the third generation of women were no longer non-schooled but were secondary school dropouts despite the availability of schools in the vicinity and all three generations were engaged in the same economic activities – domestic service, home-based preparation and sale of food and manual labour. Other secondary school dropouts from low income families were migrant women domestic workers. In the wet zone and dry zone villages of Sri Lanka, where mothers who had access to secondary education were able to find jobs as teachers, nurses and clerks, their secondary-educated daughters were unemployed, or engaged in unviable self-employment, or were garment factory workers. The grandmothers of middle class women had been household managers, the mothers were employed chiefly as teachers, and many of the daughters had a university education and were employed as professionals in Sri Lanka or overseas, with rapid socio-economic mobility. It did not appear too that the employment prospects of the daughters of these women in the study were likely to be different (CENWOR, 1987).

These different trajectories of employment were also seen in other studies. A significant fact that surfaced was that until the 1960s senior secondary and higher education were agents of upward occupational mobility (Strauss, 1950; Uswatte Aratchi, 1974). For instance, middle class and less affluent women came out from their enforced domesticity to enter universities, and subsequently the professions. Women who completed secondary education had access to mid-level employment. This relationship changed from the late 1960s with the high incidence of unemployment and socio- economic differences in access to professional science-based, science and arts courses (Jayaweera, 1984).

The social composition of the university student population changed radically from its elite, professional family base in 1950 to a rural and more egalitarian socio-economic milieu by the mid-1960s. Around 70 per cent of university entrants have been first generation students for decades but unemployment limited their upward occupational mobility. Women were particularly disadvantaged in this respect.

A study of unemployed women who graduated from the universities of Sri Lanka from 1972 to 1978 found that 39.5 per cent of the respondents were unemployed and 67 per cent of those employed were in teaching jobs earning secondary educated level salaries, since they were channelled to these

jobs as a result of a state intervention programme in 1976 to reduce graduate unemployment. It was also noted that 85 per cent of these graduates were from the rural sector, from schools that did not offer secondary school facilities in science education, and that three-quarters were from relatively low income families. Some of them were high academic achievers (Sri Lanka Federation of University Women, 1980). Another study of a sample of 1974-1978 university graduates found that graduates of professional and science courses had easy access to employment, and that a substantial number of those unemployed were arts graduates from underprivileged families (Marga, 1983). Gunawardene (1980) in her study of a 1979 cohort of arts graduates observed that more than half the graduates were in jobs for which a degree was not required, over 70 per cent were from low income families chiefly in the agriculture sector, and many graduates were in the same low skill jobs in the informal sectors as their parents.

Tracer studies of graduates of professional university courses offer further insights into the relationship between education and employment. A study of women agriculture graduates found a high degree of intergenerational mobility in educational levels, as only 7.2 per cent fathers and 2.3 per cent of the mothers had a university degree. Only half the women, however, had achieved intergenerational upward occupational mobility as 45 per cent were successful in finding professional jobs in the agriculture sector, 46.7 per cent were shunted into teaching jobs in schools, some of which did not teach agriculture or did not attach importance to agriculture, and 8.3 per cent were unemployed. The women graduates articulated their strong conviction that they were victims of gender-based discrimination, as the professional jobs for which they had applied had been perceived to be "unsuitable" for women (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 1992a).

The tracer study of women engineering graduates found an equally high degree of intergenerational mobility through education as well as occupational mobility for 85 per cent from the mid-level occupational status of their parents to two career professional elite family status as they had married engineers, surgeons, doctors or scientists. A minority from rural families and schools had not achieved equal success. All the women engineering graduates experienced gender-related constraints to promotions and further upward occupational mobility in jobs that were socially constructed as male areas of excellence (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 1992b). In both these studies, many women graduates achieved upward occupational mobility but social class and gender ideology were barriers to advancement for some of the graduates.

A study in 2000 of a cohort of 1,234 women who graduated between 1990 and 1995 encapsulates some of these trends (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 2002). Socio-economic differentiation in access to university courses was unchanged with easier access to students from professional families to professional science-based courses (e.g. engineering, medicine), and the concentration of students from low income families in arts and commerce courses. It was clear that unemployment was no longer a problem for only arts graduates.

A hierarchic structure was observed analogous to social class stratification:

- Students of almost all professional courses were employed in professional jobs, except in the case of agriculture and law graduates, half of whom were in professional jobs and others in mid-level jobs.

- Of the science graduates, one-third were in professional jobs, 45.5 per cent men and 50.9 per cent women were in mid-level jobs, and 9.6 per cent men and 15 per cent women were in non-graduate jobs.

- Only 10.6 per cent men and 5.3 per cent women management graduates and 8.1 per cent men and 2.6 per cent women arts and commerce graduates were in professional jobs, half to two-thirds of these men and two-thirds to three-quarters of the women graduates were in mid-level jobs and 10-20 per cent of the men and women graduates were in non-graduate jobs.

Table 13: Distribution of Jobs by Level of Employment

	Professional Science 1		Professional Science 2		Science		Professional Arts		Commerce and Arts		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Professional Jobs %	14596.7	68100	1456	2379.3	6337.7	3836.5	916.3	1017.8	228.1	82 6	25237.7	14625 0
Middle Level Jobs %	21.4	—	936	517.2	7645.5	5350.9	2748.2	3155.4	17364.1	23375.6	28843 0	32357.2
Non-Graduate Jobs %	10.7	—	—	—	169.6	65.8	1017,9	814.3	3011.1	289.1	57 8.5	427.4
Not Reported %	31.9	—	28	13.4	127.2	76.7	1017.9	712.5	4516.7	3912.6	7210.8	549.6
Total	151	68	25	29	167	104	56	56	270	308	669	565

Professional Science 1: Medical, Dental, Veterinary, Engineering I & II;

Professional Science 2: Agriculture:

Professional Arts: Management and Law

Source: Swarna Jayaweera and Thana Sanmugam, Graduate Employment in the 1990s, Centre for Women's Research, 2002.

A substantial number of these graduates had perforce to accept jobs offered under the state intervention programmes of the 1990s as an alternative to unemployment. Hence 34.1 per cent of men graduates and 50.5 per cent of women graduates had teaching appointments at lower salaries or mid-level jobs such as development assistants in the public service; and 8.4 per cent men and 7.4 per cent women had non-graduate jobs such as clerks, bookkeepers, cashiers, factory workers, labourers and cultivators. It is salutary to note also that 83.1 per cent of the men and 89.2 per cent of the women appointed under the state intervention programmes stagnated in their positions.

From a gender perspective therefore, more women graduates than men graduates were in mid-level employment and fewer women had moved up to better jobs. At the upper end, 4.4 per cent men graduates and 0.8 per cent women graduates received salaries of over Rs. 20,000, and the highest salary earners (Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 35,000) were men. While intergenerational mobility had been achieved in educational levels, education had ceased to be an agent of upward mobility for many. The gap between educational achievement and remunerative employment had widened, and women were relatively more disadvantaged than men in access to remunerative employment and economic returns from employment.

Unlike in the earlier phase, many agriculture, science, management, commerce as well as arts graduates could achieve only horizontal mobility in mid-level employment. It is also instructive to note that this pattern of horizontal rather than upward vertical mobility was reproduced in the lower levels of employment as seen in a study of occupational mobility among women workers in manufacturing

industries. Women workers in industrial establishments in Colombo moved from industry to industry as machine operators and promotions were given irrespective of GCE A/L, GCE O/L, incomplete secondary education or primary education attainment (Jayaweera and Sanmugam, 1993).

Determinants of the Relationship between Education and the Labour Market from a Gender Perspective

Overall, the trends since the 1970s have been:

1   A dual relationship between education and employment where lack of education is not an impediment to some levels of employment and higher education does not guarantee employment but is necessary for high level employment.

2   A bifurcation into upward vertical occupational mobility for those from privileged and more favoured socio-economic families and horizontal mobility for the majority of the non-affluent. The relationship between education and the labour market is affected by socio-economic structures and the social construction of gender. Women of different social classes and the same education attainment have been seen in the studies to have different career paths. Men and women with the same education attainment tend to reach different levels of employment in a labour market, horizontally and vertically segmented by gender.

The structural locations of gender equality/ inequality in education and the labour market are the family, the education system, labour market structures and trends and social norms and concomitant attitudes.

Despite the fact that around 25 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, parental aspirations for the education of both daughters and sons are high since free education obviated the need to invest resources mainly in the education of boys. Since education is perceived as an avenue to remunerative employment, the family environment is supportive but there is gender differentiation in vocational preferences for boys and girls. The pervasive impact of gendered child-rearing practices, socialization and gender role stereotypes that operate in families tend to limit the vocational options of girls. Consequently women tend to be confined to a narrow range of skills that disadvantage them in a changing economy.

The education system has its positive and negative structures that impinge on labour supply. It was seen that free education at all three levels, the provision of appropriate incentives and the establishments of central schools as agents of upward mobility accelerated the pace of extending educational opportunities to most socio-economic strata in the population. Nevertheless the failure to develop generic skills such as initiative, decision-making, problem-solving, team work and responsibility, demanded by employers, in the context of a uniform, centralized curriculum focused chiefly on cognitive development, became a barrier to the absorption of women and men university graduates and school leavers in employment in a surplus labour situation (Marga, 1991).

The inequitable distribution of skills in technical and vocational institutions and their relative isolation from the labour market prevented the optimal utilization of employment opportunities. A tracer study of former trainees in selected vocational training programmes in two districts found that 28 per cent of women trainees in one district and 48.2 per cent in the other district were unemployed; 52 per cent and 35 per cent respectively had found jobs related to their training; and half to two-thirds had moved from one course to another in a futile search for employment (Jayaweera, 2001). The emergence of vocational trained unemployed is indicative of the hiatus between education and the labour market from both supply and demand perspectives. On the other hand, vocational training cannot create employment. The plight of products of pre-vocational courses in schools and job-oriented courses in university arts faculties in the 1970s underscores the failure of curriculum reforms in an economy that cannot absorb the products of the reforms (Bastanpillai, 1983).

Labour market structures and trends have a decisive role in determining employment related outcomes of education. In Sri Lanka the poor absorptive capacity of the economy in a context of sluggish economic growth was mainly responsible for the high incidence of unemployment. The economic reward and incentive structures influenced aspirations. The demand for labour generated the quantum and quality of job opportunities.

From a gender perspective, demand and supply factors reinforced the gender based demarcation of the labour market. Pressures from the international labour market and its incorporation of local labour were accelerated by globalization. The international division of labour was also characterized by an inequitable gendered division of labour. The gap between demand and supply was wider for women than for men. The demand for low cost female labour for the international labour market and the world wide casualization of labour ensured the deterioration in the quality of employment to which women had relatively easy access and widened the gender gap in remunerative employment. Women were also more adversely affected by the structures created as alternatives to unemployment.

The overall macro policy framework over the decades has eschewed gender differentiation in general education policies but has not been gender-sensitive in employment-related policies. The bias since the late 1970s has been in favour of large enterprises resulting in the marginalization of small producers of whom the majority are women. Working women, whether in export-oriented industries, overseas domestic labour or plantation labour have been perceived as human resources to be used to increase revenue with little concern for their working conditions or quality of life and for the fact that these women make a major contribution to national development and household incomes without commensurate rewards. The dichotomization of social and economic development has had a deleterious impact as education expansion outran economic development, thereby negating the expected outcomes of extending educational opportunity.

Underpinning these developments are the gendered norms and the gender role assumptions of policy makers and employers that promote the use of low cost female labour as "secondary earners", the deskilling of educated women workers and the "housewifization" of women in rural development programmes. Gender-based discrimination and flawed perceptions of gender roles are inbuilt in the preferences of employers for men workers as "breadwinners" and "natural" figures of authority as managers. Aturupane (1996) found evidence of employers' bias against appointing women to managerial positions of authority, substantiating the existence of the "glass ceiling" that limits the level in the employment hierarchy to which women can aspire.

Conclusion

Over six decades ago education was envisaged by policy makers to function as an agent of social mobility facilitating access to the highest positions in the administrative and employment structures. Education contributed to the promotion of this goal for two decades. The relationship between education and the labour market changed over time, even reversing some earlier gains. The great expectations from education in the 1950s and 60s were not realized fully thereby creating youth unrest and conflict.

The relationship was often conflictual. Economic development did not keep pace with educational expansion and the lack of sustained economic growth and narrow educational objectives stymied expected outcomes. Education promoted gender parity but the labour market reinforced gender disparities. For the majority of women, the role of education in facilitating upward occupational mobility was limited by the interface of class and gender, while social and gender inequalities were reproduced and the gender division of labour reinforced by the inequitable distribution of knowledge and skills. Education appears to have promoted selective mobility replete with social class and gender nuances. It is a moot point, however, whether education can compensate adequately for poverty,

increase employment opportunities for women, or transform social and gender relations without support from the political, economic and social environment.

The Sri Lanka experiences are not unique in Asia. Many South Asian countries have limited access to education and employment. Southeast Asian countries have had education expansion, rapid economic growth and better absorption of labour in employment. Sri Lanka has had relative success in education and poor performance in creating employment. However, most Asian countries, irrespective of educational or economic status, are bedevilled by the negative impact of the social construction of gender and unequal international economic relations.

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Social Policy, Education and Gender in Bangladesh

Simeen Mahmud

Introduction

In the last decade, Bangladesh made significant achievements in aggregate levels of school attendance and witnessed a closing of the gender gap in enrolment in basic education (Grades I-IX) and narrowing of rural urban differences. In fact, gender and urban rural parity are comparable to those in Sri Lanka, and levels of primary and secondary gross enrolment similar to those in countries with higher per capita incomes such as Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004). Unfortunately, even with tremendous gains in access to school, particularly for girls, there is continued and even rising differentiation by gender in educational outcomes such as school completion, learning competencies and performance at certificate examinations. This also extends to the broader livelihood outcomes in terms of access to higher education, employment opportunities and earnings. In other words, progress towards attaining gender parity in access to basic education is not accompanied by equality of opportunity for boys and girls to develop their full potential and improve the conditions of their lives and livelihoods, the ultimate goals for which education is desired. The Bangladesh experience is noteworthy for having taken place within a policy context of strong commitment and sustained public and private efforts to promote girls' education and a social context of highly entrenched patriarchal structures, gender segmented labour markets and cultural norms restricting women's participation in the public domain.

Social policy in Bangladesh has been driven not only by the imperatives of evolving economic policy, conditioned as they are by the dependence on foreign aid, but has also responded to the needs of a population experiencing enormous social and economic transformations (Ahluwalia and Mahmud, 2004). This policy flexibility has given Bangladesh the capacity to adjust and adapt even in the face of resource constraints, a large and growing population and almost endemic and generally high poverty levels. In fact, the Bangladesh programme to promote girls' education has been described as 'the world's vanguard programme of this type' with significant lessons to be learned both with respect to financial sustainability of programme effects and with respect to the profoundness of change in behaviour and norms regarding parental investments in children (WB, 1999).

Unfortunately, however, social and economic relations of production and reproduction remain highly patriarchal despite favourable policies, restricting both what women can aspire to and what they are actually able to do, thus perpetuating gender inequalities in outcomes. Bangladesh is still regarded as a country where women have a lower status compared to men in private and public life, where patriarchal practices make women nearly powerless to improve their lot (early marriage, violence, divorce, maternal mortality), and where women's low status and powerlessness are tacitly accepted and even tolerated by society. Many believe, however, that education is the key to eliminating gender inequality in power and status and in bringing about social transformation for a more just society.

This paper examines the complex process of conflict and compromise in education policy making and provisioning to see how social policy and education policy particularly have addressed the issue of gender disparity in access and the broader question of gender inequality in educational attainment. The next section describes the structure of the Bangladesh education system and its inherent biases.

This is followed by a discussion on aspirations surrounding education, a discussion on policies and provisioning of education, the unfinished agenda of gender and education, and some conclusions.

Access to Basic Education: Has There Been a 'Leap from Parity to Equality'?

The education system in Bangladesh consists of primary education (Grades I-V), secondary and higher secondary education (Grades VI-XII) and tertiary or university education, in addition to literacy and non-formal adult education and technical and vocational education. In the endeavour to provide education at all these levels the private sector complements state efforts in various degrees, with increasing involvement during the last decade. In this section we examine to what extent the education system has been able to address issues of parity and equity in access to basic education (primary and secondary education).

The primary education system is currently composed of nearly 80,000 institutions (or nearly one primary school in every village), which includes government schools, government-supported private schools, religious schools (*madrasas*), non-formal primary schools managed by NGOs, and satellite and community schools for hard-to-reach children and school dropouts. Just after independence in 1971 the number of primary schools soared by 37 per cent to nearly 40,000 of which less than 4,000 were private schools (Banbeis, 2002, p. 32). Thus, before 1975 the entire expansion occurred for state run schools, largely the consequence of the nationalization of all primary schools in 1973.

In contrast, between 1975 and 1990 the number of non-state schools increased slowly (to 9,586), while the number of state schools remained virtually unchanged. The greatest expansion occurred after 1990, when the government enacted the Compulsory Primary Education Act, with the addition of more than 20,000 schools between 1990 and 2000.[1] In this period, too, expansion was confined to the registered non-government or private schools, while the number of government schools remained static. As a result, currently only half the primary schools (49 per cent) are state run and managed schools, while 25 per cent are private registered schools and 6 per cent are religious schools.[2] Since 1996 large numbers of other primary level schools have been set up with government support, such as community schools, satellite schools, experimental schools attached to teacher training institutes, and primary schools attached to high schools and *madrasas*. The non-mainstream community schools tend to have lower costs per pupil[3] and possibly a lower quality of teaching as well.

The number of primary school teachers also increased nearly threefold between 1970 and 2000, with the major increase coming after 1990, standing at over 0.27 million, of which 31 per cent were women (Banbeis, 2002, p. 33). The proportion of female teachers, which was as low as 8 per cent in 1985 increased to 21 per cent by 1990 indicating government efforts to create a more enabling environment for girls' school attendance. These efforts evidently paid off, resulting in a tremendous increase in the number of enrolled children, particularly girls. The number of students in primary schools went from 5.2 million in 1970 to 17.7 million in 2000, of which 49 per cent were girls. This meant an average growth rate of 8 per cent annually which was far higher than the population growth rate. The major increase in enrolment took place between 1985 and 1995 when 8.2 million children entered primary school. Girls also took advantage, and between 1985 and 2000 the proportion of girl students at primary grades increased from 40 to 49 per cent.[4] The share in enrolment varied among the different types of primary schools and was relatively higher in the government schools, which enrolled nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) of all school-going children, while private schools enrolled 28 per cent.[5] These proportions were similar for boys and girls. This reflected a preference for sending children to government

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[1] The number of schools increased from 47, 241 in 1990 to 68, 350 in 2000 (Banbeis, 2002).

[2] The rest are NGO run non-formal schools and other special schools.

[3] Due to lower teacher salaries, higher number of students per classroom and higher teacher-student ratios (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 54).

[4] This proportion was 32 per cent in 1970 (Banbeis. 2002, p. 34).

[5] Madrasa 5 per cent and others including NFE 6 per cent.

schools, and is confirmed by the fact that government primary schools consistently had higher pupil-teacher ratios regardless of region, compared to other types of school (CAMPE 2005).

At the secondary level there is even wider partnership with the private sector. Secondary education has been traditionally provided by the private sector, and this tradition was continued as the government strategy to achieve rapid expansion of secondary school enrolment and to meet increased demand for continuing education from primary school leavers. Since the government subsidizes private secondary schools by paying 90 per cent of base teacher salaries, this also allowed the government to keep costs of providing secondary education down as cost per pupil was lower in non-government secondary schools compared to government-run schools.[6]

The number of secondary schools registered a gradual increase, doubling between 1970 and 1995 (from 5,794 to 12,012), with almost the entire increase located in the private sector, which currently accounts for 98 per cent of secondary schools.[7] The big jump in school expansion came after 1995 when the number of private secondary schools increased by 31 per cent in five years from 11,695 to 15,403 in 2000 (Banbeis, 2002, p. 35). This rise coincided with the countrywide adoption in 1994 of the Countrywide Female Secondary School Stipend Programme. After 1985 there was also a significant increase in the number of secondary school teachers, with roughly 30,000 teachers recruited annually. By 2000 there were 0.17 million secondary school teachers of whom 15 per cent were women, a figure that had been around 10 per cent up to the mid-1980s.

Secondary school enrolment followed closely the increase in the numbers of secondary schools and teachers (Banbeis, 2002, p. 37). In 2000 the number of students at the secondary level stood at 7.65 million with 53 per cent girls. The visible jump in enrolment occurred after 1990 with 2.12 million entering between 1990 and 1995 and another 2.53 million by 2000. The female share in secondary school enrolment rose gradually to reach one-third by 1990.[8] After 1990 girls outnumbered boys among entering students,[9] reversing the male bias in enrolment in secondary grades, with the female share in enrolment being 53 per cent in grades VI-X and 51 per cent in Grades XI-XII in 2002 (Banbeis, 2003).

Clearly, the major policy thrust and boost to public investment in basic education came in 1990 for primary education and in 1995 for secondary education. Also, clearly basic education provision is very much a public-private partnership, especially since the mid-1990s. But to what extent has this thrust been able to expand the chances of all children going to school and reduce gender disparity in access?

Enrolment ratios (children enrolled in a grade as a per cent of all children in the target age group) measure the likelihood of children of school-going age to be enrolled in school. Primary school gross enrolment ratio (GER) was around 40 per cent in the middle of the 20th century, rising gradually and with considerable fluctuations until the late 1970s to about 60 per cent,[10] remaining stagnant during the 1980s, then rising rapidly and consistently to over 90 per cent in 2000 and 113 in 2003 (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004, p. 4093; UNICEF and BBS 2004, p. 66; and Table 1 below). Net enrolment ratio (NER) for boys and girls was 60 per cent in 1990, rising to 82 per cent in 1995, 85 per cent in 2002 and 90 per cent in 2004 (CAMPE, 2005, p. 30). Since the mid-1990s NER for girls has been higher than for boys at 86 per cent and 84 per cent respectively in 2002 and 92 per cent and 87 per cent in 2004 (CAMPE, 2005). Thus, nearly all school age children have access to primary schooling and the gender gap in access to primary schooling has not only closed, but reversed, so that Bangladesh can now claim to have attained gender parity in enrolment.

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[6] The cost per pupil was $16 per year in non-government secondary schools compared to $68 in government run schools (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 54).

[7] In 1995 there were only 317 government secondary schools, all located in urban areas.

[8] 32.6 per cent in 1985 (Banbeis, 2002, p. 37).

[9] Between 1990 and 1995, 66 per cent of new students were girls, while between 1995 and 2000, 64 per cent were girls (Banbeis, 2002, p. 37).

[10] One estimate gives a GER figure of 46 per cent in 1991 (Alam and Begum, 2002).

However, even with near universal enrolment about 10 per cent of school age children are denied access to primary school. Table 1 shows that children from poor households, those living in rural areas and to some extent boys compared to girls are more likely to be the ones excluded.[11] The persistent "wealth gap" in enrolment in spite of expanded access to school is a worrisome feature of education development that Bangladesh shares with other developing countries (Filmer and Pritchett, 1999; Knodel and Jones, 1996).

Table 1 Gross Enrolment Ratios by Sex, Residence and Poverty Status, 2000

Level of Education	Urban			Rural			All Areas		
	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both
Primary (Grades I-V)									
Poor	81.2	88.8	84.9	82.1	87.3	84.6	82	87.5	84.6
Non-Poor	104.8	97.3	101.1	99.1	101.8	100.4	100.3	100.8	100.5
All	93.5	93.3	93.4	88.6	92.7	90.6	89.4	92.8	91.1
Junior Sec (Grades VI-VIII)									
Poor	26.1	37.2	31.1	29.3	42.6	35.9	28.8	41.8	35.1
Non-Poor	75.8	75.2	75.5	60.5	79.5	70	64.1	78.4	71.4
All	53.2	61.1	57.2	43.3	59.3	51.2	45.3	59.7	52.5
Secondary (Grades IX-X)									
Poor	11.3	30.2	21	19.3	21.9	20.5	18.1	23.4	20.6
Non-Poor	88.8	83.3	85.9	72.7	77.9	75	76.5	79.5	77.9
All	61.7	64.9	63.3	47.4	49.4	48.3	50.3	51.3	51.6
Higher Sec (Grades XI-XII)									
Poor	21	9.6	15.5	15.9	8.6	13.4	16.7	8.9	13.8
Non-Poor	118.5	107.6	113.6	72	56.1	65.8	83.4	70.9	78.4
All	90.3	74.7	83.1	48.3	38.3	44.6	57	48.4	53.6

Source: WB and ADB, 2003, p. 51: Estimates based on 2000 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

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[11] In extremely poor rural households (always food deficit) 25 per cent of children were never enrolled compared to only 6 per cent in households who had no food deficit or were surplus (CAMPE 2005, p. 62).

The transition rate from primary to secondary level, which is the number enrolled in Grade VI as a percent of the number completing Grade V, increased after the mid-1990s rising to 83 per cent in 1997.[12] However, since only 60 per cent of primary school age children actually finished Grade V and were eligible to enter Grade VI, the effective proportion of school age children entering secondary school at Grade VI was only 50 per cent. Not surprisingly, overall gross enrolment at the secondary grades was much lower, at only 35 per cent in Grades VI-VIII and dropping to 14 per cent in Grades XI-XII. Girls' advantage in enrolment continued into the junior grades (VI-VIII) and secondary grades (IX-X), but reversed in higher secondary grades (XI-XII). The observed higher gross enrolment for girls in secondary grades needs to be interpreted with caution because sex differences in grade repetition could distort gender comparisons.[13] Thus, although girls and boys were more or less equally likely to attend secondary school nearly half the children of secondary school age were deprived of access to secondary school. As before children in poor households and living in rural areas were over-represented among those deprived. At the higher secondary grades where the gender gap remained, the disturbing pattern was that it was relatively greater among poor households and in urban areas, indicating that adolescent girls in poor families and those living in the cities and towns faced a double deprivation.

Despite the significant achievements in access and gender parity in enrolment the emerging picture of access to basic education is not entirely rosy since educational outcomes are generally very poor and highly inequitable. Primary school dropout rates in 2000 were 10 per cent in Grade I, 8 per cent in Grade II, 13 per cent in Grade III, and 11 per cent in Grade IV, i.e. 42 per cent of children entering Grade I did not reach Grade V, and children who enrolled in primary school required an average of 8.7 years to complete the primary cycle, indicating high repetition rates (WB and ADB, 2003, p, 56). Dropout rates in the primary grades were similar or slightly lower for girls compared to boys, but girls were much more likely to discontinue school after Grade V (30 per cent discontinuation rate for girls aged 6-14 compared to 21 per cent for boys) (CAMPE, 2005, p. 65).

At the secondary level there is less reliable information on retention and completion, but the situation is equally grim. In 2001 the total dropout rate in the mainstream[14] secondary Grades IX-X was 37 per cent and the female dropout rate was 38 per cent according to school-based data (Banbeis, 2002). The corresponding repetition rates were 13 and 11 per cent respectively for boys and girls. This suggests that girls were slightly less likely to drop out before completing Grade X and also less likely to repeat grades compared to boys. Household-based survey data, however, which give population-based estimates and hence are more reliable, indicate that in rural areas girls were more likely to drop out from secondary Grades VI-VIII than boys at 18.4 per cent and 13.7 per cent of girls and boys aged 6-14 respectively (CAMPE, 2005, p. 65). Dropout rates were also seen to vary by level of secondary school. In 2001 these rates were 20 per cent in junior Grades (VI-VIII), 53 per cent in Grades IX-X and 43 per cent in higher secondary Grades XI-XII (Banbeis, 2002).

Thus, although progress towards gender parity in enrolment has been made in the last decade these achievements are undermined by the absence of progress in achieving equality of educational outcomes in terms of continued schooling, learning achievements and academic qualifications. These inequalities are both socio-economic and gender-based, and are a glaring reminder that educational deprivation in Bangladesh is not yet "history" or a thing of the past. As one researcher aptly commented, gender parity reflected "equality in sharing deprivation".[15]

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[12] The transition rate from primary to secondary was estimated to be 79 per cent in 1994 and 83 per cent in 1997 from national educational statistics collected by BANBEIS (WB, 1999, p. 21).

[13] Because of higher grade repetition more girls than boys will be enrolled in a particular grade giving a higher gross enrolment ratio for girls, which can give a misleading impression of female advantage (Knodel and Jones, 1996, p. 688).

[14] Not including religious schools.

[15] "Investing in People: Education with Quality and Equity", PRSP thematic background paper on the education sector.

Parental Aspirations: The Demand for Education

Even 50 years ago, with the exception of a negligible urban elite, education was not generally considered a necessity of life or even a valued resource in Bangladesh. If school enrolment reflects educational demand, then up to the late 1970s the demand for education was quite small and rose only slowly and unsteadily during the 1980s. It is only since the early 1990s that primary school attendance began to spread rapidly and consistently with a closing of the gender gap and doubling of enrolment in the last decade.

The rise in secondary school enrolment was even faster, increasing more than three-fold in the decade since the mid-1990s. Moreover, with the exception of Grades XI-XII, girls' gross enrolment exceeded that of boys for all grades in primary and secondary school, and the female advantage was seen in both poor and non-poor households (WB and ADB, 2003). Hence, the demand for schooling at both primary and secondary levels has risen considerably, particularly after the early 1990s; and, what is more significant, the demand for girls' education has increased more rapidly than the demand for boys' education. This is indeed remarkable in a society where traditionally women and girls suffer discrimination in all aspects of life, girls are valued less than boys and parents invest less on daughters than on sons. It is even more remarkable that the demand for education increased the most during the period when poverty levels remained static or may even have worsened.[16]

Rising demand for education in developing countries is discussed in literature from a variety of perspectives: economic, demographic, and sociological. In economic explanations the demand for education comes from households or parents where investment in children's education is an integral part of household livelihood strategies. Household income, assets and vulnerability, source of livelihood and education of the parents are all important determinants of the economic costs and benefits of schooling (Sathar and Llyod, 1993; Amin and Sedgh, 1998; Khandker et al., 2001; Amin and Arends-Kuenning, 2001; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004).[17] For poor families, household income is crucial since it determines whether the household can pay for the direct and indirect "money" costs of schooling. The nature of household economic activity determines the need for children's labour and the opportunity costs of schooling (foregone income in case of boys and long work days in case of girls).

Female earnings may increase the opportunity cost to a greater extent than male earnings, particularly for girls' schooling, because children, by performing domestic chores, are substitutes for adult women and can release them for market work. Conversely, because women are more likely to spend their incomes in increasing children's welfare, female earnings are likely to have a positive effect on education demand, and especially girls' education demand, by raising women's bargaining power in the household (Llyod and Blanc, 1996; Pitt and Khandker, 1996).

Household vulnerability or capacity to cope with crises (bad harvest, loss of investment, sudden illness, death, flood) is an important factor in decisions about investment in education because it increases the need to diversify income to minimize risk[18] (Cain, 1981; Amin and Arends-Kuenning, 2001). The value that parents attach to education, largely shaped by their own educational attainment, influences children's attitudes about marriage and work, educational aspirations and interest in learning, which also has a bearing on household demand for education when resources are limited (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004; Mahmud, 2005). The nature of the labour market affects demand for education: if children are readily employable as unskilled labour then demand for schooling will be weak among the poor; if children cannot find work easily then parents have a greater incentive to send them to school, and out of trouble, rather than keep them idle at home (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004).

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[16] The incidence of rural poverty (head count index) declined between 1983/ 84 and 1988/ 89, worsened between 1988/ 89 and 1991/ 92, and then showed a slight improvement by 1995/ 96 to the level of the early 1980s (BIDS, 2001, p. 20).

[17] See Buchmann and Hanum (2001) for an extensive review of factors affecting education and stratification in developing countries.

[18] Perceptions of risk may motivate parents to send children to work rather than to school in order to diversify incomes.

There are sociological explanations for variations in parental aspirations for education, based on the social and psychological cost-benefit of schooling, particularly bearing upon gender differences in aspirations. Recent evidence of the highly context-specific nature of family decisions regarding education of sons and daughters indicates the importance of cultural norms in shaping aspirations (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001, p. 85). Educational aspirations for girls will be low in societies where girls' public mobility is restricted and they are married early. Educational aspirations for boys will be low in a context where boys' early contribution to household income through labour market participation is valued. Commonly held perceptions about relative returns from boys' and girls' education, local current practices of sending children to school (people like to conform), and cultural preference for investing differently in sons and daughters cause gender differentiated "non-money" costs and benefits of schooling and influence parental aspirations differently for sons and daughters (Sathar, et al. 2005; Amin and Sedgh, 1998; Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004). Strong elite and state support for mass education and the education of girls in particular has a positive effect on aspirations of the poor by promoting a "hospitable environment" for children's schooling (Hossain and Kabeer, 2003, p. 4095). The nature of educational provisioning influences perceptions about the benefits and costs of schooling as well, and may even encourage exclusion and marginalization (Nambissan, 2003, p. 137). Education aspirations, especially among the poor, will not be strong if the type of education provided and the process of teaching is insensitive to people's situation, needs and constraints (social class, timing, relevance of curriculum, teacher behaviour, learning achievement).

Demographic explanations for the demand for education in developing countries are couched in terms of intergenerational contracts, wealth flows and the "quality-quantity" trade off (Caldwell, 1980; Kabeer, et al., 2003). Children are valuable to parents for a number of reasons such as present labour contribution, future earning potential, old age support and psychological satisfaction. However, children also have costs. They need resources and care to survive through childhood and be healthy in adulthood, to attain marketable skills for pursuing economic activity, and in patriarchal societies daughters need dowries to negotiate a good marriage.

There are opportunity costs in terms of mothers' foregone earnings because children also need parents' time. Depending on their preferences for quantity (the number of children) and quality (healthy, educated, capable children) couples decide on their family size by striking a trade off.[19] In the course of demographic transition this trade off is recalculated, resulting in a shift from a high fertility, high mortality regime to a low fertility, low mortality one. In pre-industrial patriarchal societies preference for quantity prevailed since costs were low, while benefits were high; wealth flowed from children to parents, particularly fathers, resulting in large families (Caldwell, 1980). With economic development and modernization the preference for quality becomes stronger with the need for greater investment in children, causing costs of children to rise relative to benefits and the "wealth flow" is reversed going from parents to children. In situations of limited resources declining preference for quantity (falling fertility levels) gives way to a preference for quality (allowing increased investment in children, including investment in education). It is also quite plausible, however, that growing preference for quality may accompany or even precede declining preference for quantity, in which case the rising costs of investment in children create the pressure to reduce family size and not vice versa (Kabeer, 1986; Caldwell, et al., 1999).[20]

The rise in demand for education in Bangladesh despite continuing poverty levels needs to be situated in the historical context, since history also underpins the changing macro policy context and rationale (to be discussed in the next section). During the period when Bangladesh was part of

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[19] The underlying household decision-making model is the subject of much debate, which is not possible to discuss here, but the relative bargaining positions of women and men in this decision and its effect on fertility behaviour has been the subject of much empirical research worldwide. (See the World Fertility Survey research and the Rockefeller Foundation research on women's status and fertility.)

[20] For explanations of the Bangladesh fertility transition see Kabeer, 1986; Cleland, et al., 1994 and Caldwell, et al., 1999.

Pakistan (1947-1971) the population consisted primarily of the rural poor engaged in agriculture, either as small holders or as agricultural labour, with a small relatively affluent urban elite. Fertility levels were high,[21] households were under resource constraints and children started work early, making net positive contributions to household incomes from a fairly early age (Cain, 1981, 1983). For most families children's education was not an option because of the high money and non-money costs of schooling and low perceived benefits. Education was not considered an essential investment and was seen as, and actually was, the prerogative of the few rural wealthy and the urban elite, for whom it made sense to invest in sons' schooling for the limited number of public sector jobs available at the time.

The incentive for girls' education was even less because parents faced higher non-money costs on girls' schooling because of early marriage norms, restrictions on girls' mobility and fear for their reputation, but lower benefits as well because of lower perceived returns from daughter's education (both lower earnings and lower opportunities for female employment) in a highly gender-segmented labour market. Thus, demand for schooling was relatively low among the poor compared to the non-poor, and relatively lower for girls compared to boys for all socio-economic classes.

Independence in 1971 brought considerable socio-economic upheavals including a major shift in the development paradigm/ vision. Hossain and Kabeer (2004) describe how the changing economic opportunity structure combined with high population growth ratio, rising pressure on land and a series of crises (cyclone, famine, political instability) transformed the countryside "from one based on small-scale peasant ownership, patron-client relations and localized labour markets into a monetized economy based on more impersonal wage-labour relationships" (p. 4094). In this context of changing values and opportunities education, especially of sons, attained greater significance for the non-poor resulting in the early 1980s with "school attendance being largely associated with boys from affluent urban families" (p. 4094).

For the poor too, the sectoral shift in household income sources from agricultural to non-farm livelihoods like trading, labour selling and service, meant that children's economic contributions began to decline at least from the early 1980s. In rural areas there was less opportunity for children's labour contributions not only on own farms but also from non-farm employment due to low labour productivity in these activities.[22] Increased migration to urban areas further meant that children were unemployable in the urban settings without new marketable skills.[23]

From the late 1970s poor parents in rural areas began to slowly but consciously invest in raising child quality through a variety of strategies, including sending children to school, suggesting that costs of children were increasing.[24] In other words, there was a reappraisal by poor parents of the cost benefit calculations of children, altering the quality-quantity trade off in favour of quality. One aspect of this was an increase in educational aspirations and the actual practice of sending children to school (Kabeer, 1986; Mahmud, 2004). In fact Kabeer (1986) has argued that "fertility decline reflected an emerging preference for investing in the 'quality' of children over the preference for 'quantity' which had characterized earlier eras" (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004, p. 4094). However, given that parents still had to bear all the costs of investing in children's education, aspirations were probably more widespread than actual enrolment. Qualitative studies in the 1980s provide evidence

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[21] In the early 1970s TFR was over 7 births per woman.

[22] The expansion into new non-farm occupations, mostly low-productivity self-employment, absorbed the growing numbers of landless rural workers and diversified the income sources of the poor (Mahmud, 1996). However, overcrowding in these activities undermined productivity growth and limited scope for children's labour contributions.

[23] Landless and marginally landless households grew at a faster pace than all rural households, with substantial transfer of rural poor to urban areas where earnings were on average higher.

[24] Besides rising school enrolment there was widespread adoption of oral rehydration therapy for diarrhoea and vaccinations to improve the health and survival prospects of children from the mid-1980s, causing infant and child mortality ratios to decline from the early 1990s.

of a growing awareness of the costs of large families and the realization that it was pointless to have many children if you could not educate them (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004).

During the 1980s most of the costs of investing in children were borne by parents themselves, but since the early 1990s special government programmes gave a tremendous impetus to the rising demand for children's education.[25] A significant proportion of the money costs of education was mitigated by financial incentives, allowing many poor parents to fulfil their latent aspirations. The tremendous expansion in physical infrastructure which succeeded in placing a primary school in every village, increased access to school. The provision of free tuition, food and cash stipends and free textbooks at the primary level cut the real and direct money costs of schooling, thus removing a major barrier for poor children's and girls' school enrolment and attendance.

Special provisions to promote girls' secondary school attendance (stipends for all girls in secondary schools in rural areas), to the exclusion of boys even from poor families, weakened norms restricting girls' public mobility and the strong cultural preference for investing in sons. This legitimized the practice of sending adolescent girls to school. Besides, changing opportunities for women helped to reinforce parents' willingness to educate daughters. First, the micro-credit revolution allowed poor women loans to send children, both boys and girls, to school because it gave them access to incomes and increased their bargaining position in the family. Second, the emergence of the export-oriented garment industry since the mid-1980s generated a new and growing demand for female labour with at least primary level education,[26] so that returns from girls' education became more concrete and gave poor parents an added incentive to educate them.

These developments were taking place at a time when mass and universal education received strong state support because education was seen to have an instrumental value in hastening economic growth and development. The government's visible commitment was evident in media campaigns with slogans like "Education for all" and "Send your sons and daughters to school". State support was complemented by strong popular elite support as well, who viewed education as a means for raising "awareness among the masses" to solve the problem of poverty and turn a "burden into a wealth" (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004, p. 4095). Such support reinforced the value of education generally, and the value of girls' education specifically, in a society that traditionally invested less on girls than on boys.

A common response of villagers to questions on the value of education was: "Why would the government pay the poor to go to school, or girls to go to school, if it was not important?" (Amin and Sedgh, 1998, p. 31). These attitudes strengthened the idea that education was now a necessity to progress in life, and perhaps even that education was an equalizer in a highly stratified society. It also contributed to the belief that education was a universal right, whereas in the past it was thought of as the prerogative of the wealthy. Sending daughters to school, sometimes even at the cost of withdrawing sons, was quite accepted and even justified on the grounds that schooling helped to secure a better marriage for them.[27]

Obviously, there is no single explanation for the changing aspirations and demand for education in Bangladesh. As a recent review noted, such a social transformation represents "interaction between different forces whose effects may modify, reinforce or neutralize each other" (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004, p. 4093). The decision about children's schooling is essentially the result of the interdependence of demand and supply factors that affect the cost-benefit calculations of educational investment at

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[25] Free tuition and school books, and programmes like the food (cash) for education and stipends to girls in secondary school provided financial incentives to parents to send children, especially daughters, to school.

[26] Currently 1.5 million women are employed in the export garment manufacturing industry. Studies show that garment factory workers have on average more years of schooling compared to other workers and girls from similar socio-economic backgrounds who do not participate in the labour market (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004).

[27] There is empirical evidence that the stipend programme for girls increased girls' enrolment at the cost of boys (Khandker, et al., 2001).

the household level. Fortunately, many of the structural barriers to educational aspirations and to the spread of schooling have not proved immutable, and surprisingly this has been particularly true with respect to barriers to girls' schooling. Indeed, poor parents particularly have responded readily, and somewhat unexpectedly, to public efforts in education development and education provisioning, attesting to a huge latent demand for education.

The homogeneity and density of the Bangladesh population and a shared belief that upward social mobility was possible through education (because of the absence of deeply entrenched caste distinctions), together with new patterns of behaviour by poorer women with respect to labour market participation, income earning and household decision-making could explain the 'swiftness with which educational aspirations took root' (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004, p. 4099). Policy and school provisioning, which determine the "benefits" of education, played a major role in meeting the rising demand for education and in raising aspirations further. We turn to this in the next section.

Policy and Provisioning: The Supply Response

Parental aspirations for education are shaped not only by a host of demand factors but are also influenced by the quantity and quality of educational provisioning or the "supply of education". Policy makers in Bangladesh have used the concept of the "sociology of supply" or supply generating its own demand to transform parental aspirations into the practice of sending children to school, especially among the poor. Social policy in Bangladesh, the education policy in particular, has also responded to broader social and economic changes, undergoing a historical evolution as the rationales for public investment and public effort have changed and evolved over time. These rationales have been shaped by a number of forces: national politics, international development thinking, globalization processes and domestic economic imperatives. The effects of these forces of change are difficult to isolate since many processes happened simultaneously. The combined effect of these has culminated in the present policy for education development and provisioning. This section examines how policies have emerged in response to both the micro demand for education and in response to the macro economic imperatives for investment in education development, taking a historical perspective.

In the post-colonial era (between 1947 and 1970) one of the most urgent needs of the new independent state was an efficient administration and judiciary to run the national government. Education was seen as the means for building up the infant bureaucracy and for creating a professional intellectual class to support and guide its nation-building efforts. In Bangladesh, which was then East Pakistan, there was also the political need to produce a competent and intellectually capable elite to compete with the West Pakistanis who tended to dominate the bureaucracy, industry and the army (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004).

Education provision was geared towards the urban elite class and the small rural landed class, who could afford to educate children up to the desired level. Consequently, the education system was tilted towards higher and professional education, with strong emphasis on English as the business language of the state, and very high premiums for excellence and outstanding performance.[28] Teaching was of very high quality, the number of students was small and there were effective screening devices to keep out those who did not demonstrate potential, but the system was also efficient in picking up those who had potential even in the rural areas. Many of the older members of the current bureaucracy and professional groups are first generation migrants, and often the only member of a rural-based family to have reached such a high status position in society, representing what an education of this type could do in one generation. In other words, although the education system had a highly elite and non-poor bias and hence was extremely exclusionary, it also provided the means for some, and hope for the large majority, for rapid upward social mobility and out of poverty (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004, p. 4097).

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[28] Those who excelled were rewarded with highly prestigious jobs in the civil service, in academia and in the professions.

The nature of the economy at the time justified an elitist education system as the only practical and effective means to build up the educated and professional class required to run the government. The vast majority of the unskilled and semiskilled labour engaged in agriculture and the small jute industry were seen not to require an education. Moreover, the demand for education was still very low because nearly two-thirds of the population was poor and could not afford children's education. In any case the type of education on offer was not seen as very relevant for the poor, and even the emphasis on mass education, when it came later in the early 1980s, was on the grounds of imparting a "liberal humanistic education" to raise the consciousness of the poor from the "anachronistic traditionalism of the villages" rather than for imparting specialized technical competency which was reserved for the few (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004 p. 4095). It was assumed that eventually, with modernization and economic development, the positive effects of growth would "trickle down' to reach the masses, who would experience rising incomes and a growing effective demand for education.

By the mid-1960s there was growing disillusionment regarding the "trickle down" of the benefits of economic growth, which coincided with widespread resentment against dominance by West Pakistan and the economic discrimination against the East, culminating in the War of Independence in 1971 (Islam, 2003). The constitution of the newly independent nation proclaimed: "All citizens are to be assured equal opportunity so that an egalitarian society can be established." Under the socialist development agenda of the new state all primary education institutions were nationalized in 1973 to ensure that basic education could be made accessible to all.[29] An Education Commission set up in 1974, recommended making primary education compulsory by 1980 and free by 1983. However, education did not receive special policy emphasis and only 7 per cent of the total financial outlay in the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) was allocated "for increasing development expenditure to improve education services". The political urge to be self-reliant as a nation was reflected in the fact that primary education was largely financed from domestic resources during this period.[30] This and the greater resource needs for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the post-war economy were responsible for the relatively small resource allocation to education.

With fairly high fertility rates till the mid-1980s[31] government soon found itself unable to cope with the growing number of children entering the school-going age. It decided to allow the private sector and NGOs to enter the provisioning of primary education, with the objective of making primary education services accessible to the majority of the population who were poor and lived in rural areas. Policy emphasis on universal primary education continued and the government provided all non-government primary institutions with salary supports and other assistance. Government assistance included the creation of 1934 posts of Assistant Thana Education Officer to strengthen supervision at the field level, distribution of free textbooks to all primary school children by executive order from 1980, construction of new classrooms and investment in new schools in underserved areas since 1985, intensifying teacher training and introducing school-based cluster training for teachers in 1980 (Titumir and Hossain, 2004, p. 33). Stagnating enrolment during the 1980s indicated that these efforts were not sufficient to bring poor children into primary schools to the extent it was hoped. The policy emphasis on universal primary education, reiterated in the Five Year Plan documents, appeared more token than real. Poverty, the major barrier to children's school attendance, showed no signs of abating with almost unchanging (if not rising) levels from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, although exhibiting a declining trend before that[32] (BIDS, 2001, p. 20).

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[29] Part of the larger nationalization policy of industry, banking and a large segment of trade.

[30] Only 14 per cent of development expenditure during 1976-81 comprising of donor-funded project aid (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 115).

[31] According to the Bangladesh Fertility Survey of 1989, the total fertility rate during 1984-89 was 5.1 children per woman.

[32] Estimates of rural poverty (head count index) hovered around 63 per cent between 1983/ 84 and 1991/ 92, although there was a decline in urban areas which also had a lower level of poverty at 49 per cent and 39 per cent (BIDS, 2001, p. 20).

From the early 1990s, poverty reduction together with economic growth explicitly emerged as the overall macro policy objective of the government, in which for the first time, education spending was seen as an investment for developing human resources rather than an expenditure to reach services to the population (Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans 1990-2003). This was backed up by legislation for universalizing primary education through the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act of 1990, under which school attendance was made compulsory for children aged 6-10. In the bid to bring all children to school there was also government support to non-formal primary education (NFPE) by NGOs from 1990, particularly at the insistence of donors who tended to favour NGO-education provision. In keeping with these objectives, targeted efforts to bring poor children in rural areas into the formal school system were geared up from the early 1990s, through the provision of incentives in the form of monthly wheat rations (later monetized) for regular school attendance under the Food for Education programme (FFE).[33]

The policy emphasis on universal primary education, which had received only token support in the early 1980s, was reaffirmed in 1992 with the establishment of a separate Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED), working independently of the Ministry of Education. The PMED was established specifically to formulate policy and implement programmes along the lines of Education for All (EFA) declarations in the 1990 Jomtien Conference, to which Bangladesh was a signatory.[34] The share of foreign aid jumped to 60 per cent of education Annual Development Programme allocations (ADP) during the 1984-90 period and remained at nearly 50 per cent up to the mid-1990s (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 115), suggesting much greater donor confidence on the governments' commitment and capacity to achieve EFA goals. Various projects were formulated under the new General Education Programme (1991/92 to 97) with the common goal of providing all primary school age children access to quality primary education with incentives to attend school regularly and complete the five-year learning cycle successfully. The coverage of financial incentives was expanded in 2000 with the introduction of the primary education stipend (Tk 125 per month per child using the same criteria as the FFE) for poor rural children in non-FFE areas.

Enrolment figures show that the food/ cash transfers were indeed able to bring poor children, boys and girls, to primary school, and survey evidence suggests that these were reasonably well targeted. Participation in the FFE programme increased the probability of attending school by 20 per cent on average and this positive effect was sustained over time (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 55). There was also some evidence of community participation in the school system through the establishment of school management committees and mobilization of parent teacher associations for the distribution of food and cash incentives to poor parents. Although at this stage there was no emphasis on reducing gender disparity and girls were not specifically targeted, the gains in enrolment were seen for both boys and girls and there was a narrowing of the gender gap in school attendance at the primary level.

The gender gap in educational achievement and literacy was not unnoticed and all plan documents mentioned without fail the need for "accelerated expansion of facilities for women's education to reduce the gap between the sexes". But since education was valued primarily for its instrumental role in creating a "cadre of skilled manpower" and women were not seen to be part of that cadre there was no serious attempt to address gender disparity in education.[35] Moreover, the narrowing of the gender gap at primary level without specific interventions to promote girls' education led to the belief that the gender imbalance in enrolment at higher levels would also be corrected in due time.

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[33] Children in selected poor families receive a monthly wheat ration for regular school attendance. This has been recently converted into a cash transfer and its coverage has been widened. By 1999, 2.2 million children had been reached (CAMPE, 1999).

[34] The PMED prepared a general education project to achieve EFA goals in 1996 and presented this to a nine-member donor consortium.

[35] In the First Plan women's education was emphasized with the objective of turning out teachers for primary and secondary schools. After 1990 women's education was emphasized in order to enhance their capabilities to participate in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh leading to poverty reduction and to improve women's status and reduce population growth by delayed marriage and higher contraceptive use by educated girls.

It was not till the 1990s that poverty was identified as a major obstacle to this process and specific measures were introduced to tackle the persistent problem of girls lagging behind boys in secondary school enrolment. Under the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95) girls' education was made free up to Grade VIII in all rural areas and the policy context for initiating special programmes for girls appeared extremely favourable. The effectiveness of financial incentives in actually closing the gender gap in primary enrolment lent credibility to the strategy of providing financial incentives to encourage parents to enrol their daughters into secondary school.

By the early 1990s the social environment for adolescent girls' school attendance had also become more favourable. This was due to the weakening of the norm of girls' restricted public mobility resulting from the visible employment of a large number of adolescent girls from rural areas in the urban export garment industry. Innovative NGO approaches to education, pioneered by Brac, with their emphasis on "joyful learning" and ability to attract large numbers of girls to non-formal village schools must also be credited with making girls' school attendance more socially acceptable. Brac schools set a target of 70 per cent enrolment of girls, and achieved this through a one-room school system with flexible timings, female teachers, close proximity and parental participation. Some believe that Brac school graduates entering the formal school system contributed to the improvement in the overall gender balance at the primary level (Hossain and Kabeer, 2004). This is quite plausible, given the increasing trend of sending girls to secondary school, relative to boys, already noticeable in the early 1990s before financial incentives were introduced.

In January 1994, given this favourable context and armed with the experience of a highly successful pilot project (see Mahmud, 2004a), the government launched a nation-wide stipend programme (with free tuition) for all girls in Grades VI-X, with the financial support of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and NORAD.[36] Since the year 2000, stipends were also provided to girls in the higher secondary Grades of XI and XII. Although initially stipends were provided in only 178 *upazilas* with donor assistance, the unexpected positive response convinced the government to expand the programme to the remaining 282 rural *thanas* with own funding, and in the interests of "social justice" to extend the programme to all *madrasas* as well.[37]

An econometric analysis of programme impact concluded that the school enrolment rate increased 14 per cent per year after the introduction of the programme and had a positive impact in closing the gender gap at the secondary school level, accelerating the trend that had already existed before the programme was introduced (Khandker *et al.*, 2001). This is indeed remarkable in an economy where private returns to girls' secondary education are not very high. The stipend programme also had a major positive effect on girls' secondary school retention, but actually had a negative impact on boys' enrolment and retention in rural areas.[38] The declining performance of girls in public examinations relative to boys suggests, however, that stipends did not affect girls' performance, and they performed poorly relative to boys in the public examinations.[39] Boys also scored higher than girls in tests to assess learning associated with schooling, especially in numeracy (Amin and Sedgh, 1998). Evidence suggests that the programme had wider social impacts by creating a positive attitude among community leaders and the general population towards female education (Pathmark Associates, 2001). Knowledge about the stipend programme was common among villagers and the programme was welcomed as "being good for girls".

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[36] The female stipend programme was not a stand-alone intervention. It was one component of significant reform and restructuring of the secondary education sub-sector. The emphasis was not only on expanding access but also on improving the quality of education, sustaining the improved gender equity achieved at the primary level at the secondary school level, addressing regional and rural/urban inequities in access, improving the management capacity of the Ministry of Education and improving monitoring and accountability mechanisms at the community level. How far these objectives have been achieved remains to be assessed.

[37] Under the IDA-supported FSSAP nearly twice as many girls as estimated were attracted to stipend entry points in Grades VI and IX in the 59 selected *upazilas* in 1994 (WB 2002, p. 3). *Madrasas* were not covered under the NORAD funded 7 *upazilas*.

[38] One additional year of programme duration increased the probability of girls continuing school by 60 per cent, while reducing boys' secondary school enrolment by 29 per cent and survival in school by 14 per cent (Khandker *et al.*, 2001).

[39] The SSC pass rate for girls dropped from 52 per cent in 1998 to 45 per cent in 2002, while the HSC pass rate fell from 37 to 27 per cent.

The programme is now in its second phase, and the fact that the emphasis in the second-generation project is on improving the quality of secondary education, besides financial sustainability, suggests that quality issues remain paramount.[40] There is pressure from donors, apparently quite valid, to target subsidies to poor girls on the grounds of financial sustainability,[41] a pressure that government is strongly resisting. Such resistance and the decision to further expand the stipend coverage to tertiary levels, even when it is known that learning achievements at this level are extremely low and the expenditure is unlikely to be pro-poor, strongly suggests that policy decisions are not entirely driven by notions of social justice or efficiency but have deeper political roots in terms of the need to consolidate party popularity, especially in a pre-election year.[42]

The shifting macro policy rationales and specifically the rationales in the education policy are captured in the changing pattern of public expenditure. During the last fifteen years the nature of public spending indicates a visible shift in policy emphasis from investment in agriculture and industry to development of human resources and the rural economy. This has resulted in the fact that expenditures in the social sectors (education, health, safety nets and disaster management) comprised nearly a third of total budgetary expenditures since the early 1990s (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 49). Education expenditure currently represents about 2.2 per cent of the GDP. This share is higher than for any other sector, and education has been the largest recipient of both development and recurrent budget allocations of government in the 1990s.[43] Government education allocation (and spending) increased steadily during the early 1990s (from 11 per cent of total budget allocation in 1990/91 to 16 per cent in 1994/95) and this level was sustained over the next decade.

Within social policy, education received relatively greater emphasis compared to other sectors, such as health, because education, and basic education particularly, is considered more of a public good (with relatively greater positive externalities across society). This perception led to the state taking primary responsibility for education policy making and provision. Also, private (household) expenditure on education tends to be much smaller compared to other expenditures, say on health, especially for the poor, justifying a greater share of public expenditure on education to compensate. The major portion of public education expenditure since the early 1990s was directed towards basic education (primary and secondary) with primary education receiving nearly half of all expenditures up to the mid-1990s and declining slightly after that (46 per cent in 2002/03). From the mid-1990s secondary education began to receive larger allocations, both with respect to development and recurrent expenditures.[44] This was not simply to accommodate the large cohorts completing primary school, but also reflected the shift in policy emphasis to widen secondary education access, especially for girls.

Although donor funding had increased significantly, expansion of education access in the 1990s was still mostly financed from domestic resources, unlike the health sector. In fact the share of foreign aid in education development expenditure, which was 47 per cent in the early 1990s, declined to 27 per cent by 2000 (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 55). Of the total amount allocated for stipend and tuition during the second half of the 1990s domestic resources consistently accounted for nearly 60 per cent,

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[40] In August 2004 the World Bank approved a US$100 million credit to the government for implementation of a reform programme to enhance access to and quality of secondary education.

[41] Donors do not support increasing the stipend amount for the very poor on the grounds of cost escalation and inadequacy of information for decision-making regarding targeting the very poor (why some girls do not get enrolled). Donors are actually in favour of withdrawing universal stipends as currently provided and mulling over the justification for targeting stipends to the most needy because of the imperative for cost reduction and financial sustainability.

[42] The stipend programme was initiated during the previous tenure of government of the present political party. In June 2005 the Finance Minister in his budget speech announced that girls at the graduate level would also be included under the stipend programme.

[43] Public spending on education was 18.4 per cent of current revenue expenditure and 8.6 per cent of development expenditure during the period 1990/ 91 and 1994/ 95. These proportions were 18.6 per cent and 12.1 per cent during 1995/ 96 and 1999/ 00.

[44] Primary education's share in the recurrent budget decreased from 49 per cent to 40 per cent, while secondary education's share increased from 37 per cent to 49 per cent between 1991/92 and 1999/2000. The share of secondary education's development expenditure rose from 11 per cent and 33 per cent, while primary education shares declined form 62 per cent to 49 per cent during the same period (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 54).

making government the most important actor in implementing this programme (WB, 2002). This indicates strong state commitment to increasing access despite falling donor assistance, reflecting both donor sentiments at the resistance to accept the sector-wide planning approach and government's own reluctance to permit direct donor involvement in education provision.

Turning to expenditures on financial subsidies to the poor and to promote girls' education, on average about 20 per cent of the education annual development allocation was devoted to FFE and 16 per cent was devoted to girls' stipends in the period 1997-2000. The FFE programme is reasonably well targeted to the poor (those in the poorest 20 per cent of the population are five times as likely to participate in the programme as are the richest 20 per cent of the population). The female stipend programme, on the other hand, is not targeted. Benefit incidence analysis shows that public spending in primary education is strongly pro-poor, in part because a relatively higher proportion of primary school age children are poor (three-fifths compared to two-fifths non-poor).[45] However, public spending on secondary education is extremely biased in favour of the non-poor (24 per cent received by the poor compared to 76 per cent received by the non-poor). Private education spending at all levels on the other hand, is predominantly made by the non-poor even at the primary level (WB and ADB, 2003 p. 56).

Thus, during the 1990s universal primary education was an overall objective of social policy, and within education policy access was the priority issue, with all strategies aimed at bringing children to school. The aim of universal primary education included the elimination of gender disparity in enrolment. In the meantime the quality of education was delegated to the next level of intervention or as a "beyond access" issue. At the policy level there is a clear dichotomy between ensuring access and providing quality education, both chronologically and financially. The issues of education quality and education reform, necessary to raise and ensure quality have only now begun to be acknowledged in policy. The National Education Commission of 2003 recommended several explicit measures for quality improvement of basic education provision and teacher appointment and training.[46] It recommended the application of "quality standards" in all primary schools and academic supervision to be enforced by the Directorate of Primary Education under the Ministry of Education. At the secondary level it recommended that the national curriculum board should be concerned with only curriculum development with competent professional staff. The PRSP identifies quality improvement of basic and vocational education as one of the seven medium term strategies for accelerated poverty reduction. At the primary level the PRSP identifies the second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP 2),[47] a macro plan for the period 2003-8, as the implementing agency for quality improvement. At the secondary level, however, no overall agency has been given responsibility, leaving the government's intention to improve quality open to question.

In fact declining quality of education has created other inequalities that plague future education development in Bangladesh. We consider these in the next section.

Gender and Education: An Unfinished Agenda

Public efforts to increase enrolment have undoubtedly expanded children's access to basic education, relatively more at the primary grades compared to secondary grades and relatively more for girls compared to boys. But supply side efforts are able to affect demand for education only up to a limit. They can homogenize educational aspirations but cannot eliminate differences in the cost-benefit trade-off faced by households that actually determines effective demand for education. Since poverty

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[45] The poor receive 56 per cent of public spending compared to 44 per cent for non-poor (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 55).

[46] Besides such measures as lowering the student teacher ratio, introducing learning aids, building libraries, laboratories, etc.

[47] The PEDP 2 puts special emphasis on improving the quality of education provision to all children, and on educational reform to ensure that a minimum standard of service is maintained, formulate an appropriate career and promotion structure for primary teachers and organizational capacity building for devolution of authority and improved management (Titumir and Hossain, 2004, p. 48).

was a major demand side barrier to school attendance, public intervention to expand enrolment quite justifiably began with cost mitigation strategies such as subsidies and financial incentives to poor parents. However, the fact that uptake of financial incentives was relatively less in ultra poor and very poor households and that girls from poor households were relatively less able to take advantage of stipends, indicated that such interventions increased the preference for education, and for girls' education, only in some households. As a result, there are persistent and more resilient gender inequalities that form the unfinished agenda in education policy and development in Bangladesh.

First, expansion in access has not been able to solve all "access" problems, in that the "wealth" gap in enrolment has not been eliminated and gender difference in access has not been completely erased, particularly among children of secondary school ages and in urban areas. Education deprivation has continued, with adolescent girls from poor families and urban areas suffering the worst deprivations in access to school. The second worrying feature of education provisions aimed at universalizing school attendance is that progress towards parity in access has not been accompanied by progress in achieving equality of educational outcomes. If anything, expanded access has actually created other types of gender and socio-economic inequalities, in terms of school retention, completion, learning and performance, inequalities that were not so evident in the past when education was less inclusive. Finally, expanding access to education has come at the cost of deteriorating education quality and its "transformative" character, and girls are relatively more vulnerable to the negative effects of declining quality than boys.

The female stipend programme is an example of how narrow attention on expanding access can unintentionally be exclusionary, increase inequality in outcomes and lead to deteriorating education quality. In many ways the female stipend programme was one of the boldest and most ambitious programmes for education development in Bangladesh, given the strong patriarchal structures and relations governing society and the economy. The provision of stipends was undoubtedly a strategic intervention to bring girls to secondary school by tapping into the rising demand for education, but there was an underlying rationale for the emphasis on girls' education vis-à-vis that of boys that led to contradictory objectives.

In the early 1990s the reduction of the population growth rate was a major macro policy imperative, and one way of achieving lower fertility was believed to be by keeping girls in school thereby delaying marriage and educating them to increase contraceptive prevalence. Fertility reduction was one of the most well-articulated rationales of the stipend programme. Stipends were provided to all girls in secondary school because there was very little difference in girls' age at marriage by socio-economic status and only to girls in rural areas because the fertility level was higher in rural compared to urban areas.

The absence of targeting, introduced a self-selection out of secondary school for girls from relatively poor households because of fairly restrictive criteria (minimum days of attendance and class performance) that were difficult to meet without incurring additional expenditure, like private tuition and good clothes to attend school. The condition requiring parents to sign a bond that they would refrain from getting their daughters married while receiving stipends also contributed to excluding girls from poor households, who found it more costly to delay their daughters' marriages. It also failed to reach girls in remote and underdeveloped villages that were less likely to attract good quality teachers and offered limited incentives to private providers.

Thus, existing stipends helped girls from non-poor households to a greater extent in rural areas, while poor girls in urban areas were completely bypassed. The total reliance on private provisioning to help keep costs down but the lack of supervision and monitoring of the quality of education provision on the part of the government meant that private tuition was essential to maintain the minimum grade levels and pass public examinations. This was not only exclusionary but also reflected the very

poor quality of teaching at secondary schools. Finally, and somewhat unexpectedly, the expansion of girls' secondary school attendance was at the expense of boys' enrolment, and gender parity was achieved partly at the cost of boys.

The experience of the stipend programme confirms the fragility in the demand for girls' education, particularly in poor families, where despite stipends school careers are irregular, fragmented and incomplete. Some girls never enrol. Of those that do the majority discontinue, some leaving temporarily to return and repeat a grade. A small proportion completes the required grades and takes the public examination, but only a minority actually succeed and get a certificate. Subsidies and cash transfers distort the demand for girls' secondary school education and conceal this fragility by lowering the direct costs for fees and books relatively more for girls.[48] The indirect money costs of better clothing, better food, and private tuition are considerable at the secondary level and have to be met primarily by households.[49] Parents are attracted by financial incentives to enrol girls but are less inclined to spend money for these extra costs for girls compared to boys.[50] Thus, household income constraints to school continuation, completion and performance are relatively greater for girls, and this is likely to be exacerbated by household poverty.

Higher non-money costs of girls' secondary school, that were not a factor in the case of primary school, also operate differently for boys and girls and for poor and non-poor girls in shaping educational outcomes at the secondary level. The negative effect of marriage on educational outcomes of girls is becoming stronger as some of the structural constraints to enrolment have weakened in response to financial incentives and the greater proximity of schools (Mahmud, 2005). Dowry payments that increase with every year of delay in marriage and perceptions of the increased insecurity of girls in rural and urban areas help to keep the marriage age of girls from declining very fast (Amin and Suran, 2004). Understandably, the economic pressure for girls' early marriage is greater on poor families, but the cultural/ social pressure is equally strong, if not more, as evident from the fact that girls from non-poor families are more likely to discontinue school because of marriage (Mahmud, 2005). Another non-money cost is the lower perceived return from investment in girls' education relative to boys' education. Benefits of girls' education are more aspired than actual (everyone aspires to a garment factory job but only a few get one), and vague instead of concrete like being equipped to get along in the world, a possible fallback against a bad marriage or a way of keeping girls busy until marriage (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004).

The other disturbing feature of education development in Bangladesh is that the single-minded policy focus on "universalization" of education and expanding quantitative access has come at the cost of quality. While children were coming to school in hordes, and girls were coming to school more frequently than boys, what was happening inside the classroom and in school went unnoticed. Education provisioning was unable to keep pace with the rapidity with which enrolment increased. The result has been overcrowded classrooms, double shifts, declining teacher-student ratios, falling contact times, irregular and low attendance, poor learning achievement, declining performance in public examinations, low retention and completion, and so on (CAMPE, 2005). Effectively 40 per cent of primary school age children are deprived of the full cycle of primary education and more than half of those who enter secondary school do not complete the seven-year secondary education cycle. It seems highly likely that these disappointing figures are at least in part due to the quality of education available.

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[48] Predicted costs show that the extra cost of children's schooling is greater for boys than for girls (Amin and Sedgh, 1998).

[49] In 2000 private expenditure per student in secondary schools was estimated at US$73 compared to $23 public expenditure (WB and ADB, 2003, p. 55).

[50] Forty-seven per cent of boys compared to 41 per cent of girls aged 6-14 years receive private tuition at the primary grades (CAMPE, 2005, p. 72). Since the cost of private tuition is higher at secondary grades, especially to prepare for the public examinations, girls attending secondary school are even less likely to receive private tuition compared to boys.

Of those who complete schooling what they actually learn is another question. Basic learning achievement declined consistently with the fewer the number of years spent in school and improved only slightly between 1998 and 2003. One measure of learning achievement showed that 57 per cent of children who had completed five years had basic learning competencies, compared to 21 per cent for three years and 8 per cent for one year spent in primary school (CAMPE, 1999, p. 40). In other words, the majority of children attending and completing primary school had nothing to show for it.[51] Boys learned better than girls (31 per cent compared to 28 per cent respectively) and children in urban areas did much better than those in rural areas (48 per cent and 27 per cent). Urban boys showed the best performance and rural girls the worst.

The level of basic competencies at the end of primary school strongly determined progression to secondary school. Some idea about the extent of learning achievement in secondary school is provided by performance at public examinations (SSC and HSC)[52] at the end of Grades X and XII. In general, performance at SSC examinations during the last decade has been quite low and may even have declined, with the pass or success rate among all examinees ranging from 43 per cent in 1996 to 41 per cent in 2002 (Banbeis, 2002, p. 55). The pass rate among girls was considerably lower at 35-38 per cent. In the HSC the overall pass rate was 25 per cent in 1996 and 28 per cent in 2001, with female pass rates being slightly higher at 25-30 per cent. The extremely low pass rates label almost two-thirds of adolescents who survive up to Grade X as "failures", and girls are more likely than boys to belong to this category since girls' gross enrolment is higher. Clearly, higher gross enrolment does not lead to better outcomes.

The low quality of teaching in school (indicated by the low quality of learning and heavy reliance on private tutoring to write examinations) undoubtedly compromised other quality characteristics of education as well. Education is seen as the key to improving women's social and economic status. However, to lead to empowerment and agency education must have a "transformative" character, and it must contribute to the elimination of inequality in opportunity. Education must encourage critical reflection and action instead of just imparting basic competencies and skills of the three Rs (UNESCO, 2003). Education must also dispel and undermine gender stereotypes, not reinforce them. Education provided in the millions of primary and thousands of secondary schools throughout Bangladesh can barely impart basic learning competencies; it cannot be expected to have any of the above transformative qualities.

The fact that girls' enrolment increased more rapidly is evidence that the demand for girls' schooling is more sensitive to education provisioning and quality compared to the demand for boys' schooling. Hence, low quality of education also contributes to the fragility of demand for girls' education because they are less likely than boys to get household resources to compensate for poor quality of teaching. Besides, poor physical quality of schools (libraries, toilets, playing fields, common rooms, extracurricular activities) affects girls' schooling more than boys' because girls have less access than boys to these resources outside the school. More profoundly, the lack of adequate attention on the "quality" aspects of education has led to the neglect of developing the transformative character of education valued by the common people,[53] which may result in a worsening of gender relations in society. Reports of rising violence against women and greater use of the veil by young girls going to school could be fallouts of the worsening status of women in society. On the other hand, improvement in education quality is likely to consolidate the demand for girls' education to a greater extent and actually expand access, by reducing the need for large price subsidies that distort demand and extra costs incurred by families.

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[51] In 1998 only 30 per cent of 11-12-year-old children who had completed primary school satisfied the minimum levels in all four competencies — reading, writing, numeracy and life skills (CAMPE, 1999, p. 35).

[52] Secondary School Certificate (SSC) at the end of Grade X and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) at the end of Grade XII.

[53] Those with an education, regardless of their socio-economic background, were clearly distinguished from the rest of the population in terms of language, manners, speech, clothes, and regarded with respect and awe, in a class of their own. In fact, education was seen as a way of breaking out of the existing "status quo".

This has the added advantage of freeing resources for other uses, an argument that should go down well with policy makers and donors.

It is undeniable that in a patriarchal society that values women and men differently, education for girls, even if not of the desired quality, is better than no education because of other positive effects of regular school attendance on girls' mobility, visibility, participation and status in society, as well as on the perception of their employability (a garment factory job). However, in 2002 only 5 per cent of the active labour force of 60.3 million had SSC or HSC qualifications, indicative of a highly inequitable system that rules out entry for nearly half the population and allows only a small minority to achieve any recognized qualification.[54] In such a highly inequitable system, gender-based inequality is bound to be even greater, and mere equality of access, although highly desirable in itself, cannot be the goal of policy. Closing the gender gap in access is undermined by these inequities since it is the poor and girls who are most likely to suffer educational deprivation.

Conclusions

Education is a right in its own merit but also a means for achieving other rights. In that respect, education is a powerful tool for achieving gender equality in poor societies where girls and boys start from different positions of disadvantage and are constrained in different ways from developing their full potential. It is fortunate that in Bangladesh, social policy and education policy were not seen as the residual areas for policy intervention but always featured quite prominently alongside economic policy, possibly a legacy of the socialist foundations of the war of independence from Pakistan. Public interventions to alter people's behaviour and generate demand for services and goods of a public nature had long been an accepted policy strategy of the government because of the mismatch between private and public calculations.[55] Within this policy framework, education was considered a relatively more important social sector for public action and investment because this mismatch was greater. Although education was seen as the mechanism for raising awareness of the "masses" about the preconditions for economic development, the demand for education was weak among the vast majority of the population who neither saw the need nor could afford an education for their children.

The emphasis on quantity first and getting all children to school was not unique to the Bangladesh education policy. Most international treaties including the UN Millennium Development Goals of 2000 were set out without any explicit reference to quality of education, placing emphasis upon assuring access to all and focusing instruments on the quantitative aspects of education policy[56] Even when "education of good quality" was mentioned, there was little agreement about what the term actually meant in practice (UNESCO, 2005, p. 29).

(UNESCO, 2005, p. 28). In the beginning gender in education was not a policy issue that was consciously considered. This may have to do with the fact that women's economic roles were still seen very much outside the purview of the public sphere. Later however, with women's increased participation in the public domain (garment factory work, micro credit, informal sector employment) the fact that girls were lagging behind boys in school participation caught the attention of policy makers. Today Bangladesh has an education policy that is regarded as one of the most favourable to girls in the developing world, and its success is measured by the closing of the gender gap in enrolment. The narrowing of the gap between gross and net primary enrolment ratios indicates a maturity of the education system and also that the culture of sending children to school at the appropriate age is taking root (Edu Watch 2003/4, Overview).

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[54] Only half the children aged 6-10 years complete the primary education cycle; of those that complete it only two-thirds enter secondary school. Of these only 15 per cent attain an SSC and only 6 per cent attain HSC.

[55] For example, from its inception in the mid-1960s the strategy of the massive population policy to achieve population control objectives was the creation of demand for modern contraceptives in a society where fertility preferences were very high.

[56] Even when "education of good quality" was mentioned, there was little agreement about what the term actually meant in practice (UNESCO, 2005, p. 29).

At the secondary level too, expansion in access had wider effects in terms of changing the attitudes of society to girls' education. Parents feel an obligation to send their daughters to school, although they had earlier discriminated against them, since they realize that the government places a high value on girls' education and is willing to support their efforts. Thus, even if there has not been a large direct effect on education outcomes beyond achieving parity in access and enrolment or on age at marriage[57] and girls' employability, norms and practices have changed, completely transforming the view of the countryside where now groups of adolescent girls walking to school in the morning is a common sight. Once such positive norms are established they are difficult to reverse. Tackling the more difficult challenge of altering the norm of girls' early marriage must build on this success.

Achieving parity in access is believed to be the first step towards achieving equality of outcomes (UNESCO, 2003), but it should not dilute commitment to providing good quality education that is needed to achieve equitable outcomes. The achievement of gender parity in access has been relatively easy because of the growing educational aspirations in society at large, but this success hides and diverts attention from the fragile nature of an effective demand for education, particularly for girls' education, that creates more resilient gender and socio-economic inequalities in outcomes. Removing outcome inequalities and consolidating demand are complex challenges because these are less amenable to purely supply side policy interventions. These inequalities arise from structural demand constraints like household poverty and societal marriage norms that fall beyond the purview of the sectoral education policy and need to be addressed in a more integrated manner. However, supply constraints (low quality of teaching, relevance of curriculum, physical facilities) also contribute to a weak demand for girls' school retention, completion and good performance. Policy must now be concerned with addressing both the demand constraints and with reform and restructuring to improve the quality of education provision. This can be done by moving away from the emphasis on expanding access and increasing numbers, and resisting decisions that are politically motivated but actually do not contribute to gender equality in the long run. Assessment of progress towards gender equality cannot be on the basis of numbers alone. It must establish whether the changes that are achieved are significantly altering unequal gender relations that cause gender inequalities in outcomes.

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[57] Recent data indicates that while secondary school enrolment of girls has expanded, this has not had any effect in delaying girls' marriage (Amin and Suran, 2004).

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Gender Equity in Education from a Social Policy Perspective: Towards an Analytical Framework

Ramya Subrahmanian

Introduction: Outlining the Challenge

The 1990s represented a watershed in international cooperation around education. Marked by the Education for All Conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, the start of the Education for All decade saw unprecedented commitment to financing and promoting basic education by international donors and national governments. For governments emerging from the assault on social sectors that was caused by structural adjustment policies, which had negative policy and institutional consequences, including the charging of user fees for primary schooling and the decline of teacher morale in the face of public expenditure squeezes, the EFA decade offered a chance to reconstruct their education systems, and reverse declines in education access and participation.

The EFA decade has many acclaimed successes. The world as a whole is moving closer towards reaching the EFA goals. There have been major strides towards UPE, as measured by net enrolments, in South and West Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and in some of the Arab states. There has also been a strong global move towards greater gender parity, particularly at the primary level, where the ratio of enrolled girls to boys has improved from 88 per cent to 94 per cent over the past decade.

However, does the progress towards gender parity in schooling reflect meaningful changes in the access of girls to equitable and quality schooling? Has it been part of a wider movement to improve the equitable distribution of quality education to all, regardless of income or membership of a social group? Does progress as measured in terms of the EFA agenda reflect the challenges that have been laid down in other global consensus documents such as the Platform for Action agreed at the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women?

The Beijing agenda outlined a comprehensive range of actions for girls' education, emphasizing both the need for a change in the vision for education, moving away from a focus on schooling to the lifelong learning needs of women and men, as well as the importance of a non-discrimination-based approach to schooling and education. Actions outlined on education by the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, supported the focus on girls' education, and placed emphasis on achieving gender equality in education. The attention paid to female education in the MDGs has also complemented the international focus on girls' education.

Of the twelve critical areas for action[1] identified at the Beijing Conference, it can be argued that the greatest progress has been made in girls' schooling. The 1990s witnessed unprecedented attention

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[58] The twelve critical areas of concern: women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl child.

to girls' education, and quite positive progress towards universal enrolment. Despite the debilitating consequences of the adjustment policies on educational services in several countries during the 1980s and some of the 1990s, donor and government action has now resulted in education becoming centre-stage in pro-growth economic strategies. Investment in human capital and human resources occupies significant space as a policy issue in many national government strategies and PRSP documents.

While progress on girls' education in different countries has been due to specific international and national initiatives, demand side pressures have played an equally important role in advancing the agenda. Across the world, demand for girls' education has grown, as opportunities for women increase in different forms of employment, and as information and communication technologies shrink technological and economic distances. The motivations for demand may vary – for example, it may mean remaining competitive in a marriage market in some cases, and in others, it may enhance competitiveness in gaining access to jobs. The thresholds for education completion may also vary – in many cases, extending as far as primary education completion, but not beyond. Despite varied patterns and rates of progress, the aspirations and opportunities unleashed by at least a decade of education programmes aimed at accelerating the enrolment of girls in school, have set in motion a trend that is here to stay. Whether this demand will be met with timely and quality responses from governments and other providers remains a matter of concern.

Finally, and of equal importance, is the issue of those children who still lack access to basic or primary education. According to UNICEF estimates in 2004, of 121 million out-of-school children, 65 million were girls. These children are typically found in situations of conflict, and amongst groups that are socially excluded within their societies, who are squeezed out because services do not reach them, or amongst the chronically poor. Despite education being touted as one of the "magic bullets" that will challenge poverty and boost growth, the education investment strategies of poor families are vulnerable to economic insecurity and shocks, health crises including HIV/ AIDS, and political instability. Economic rights are a necessary corollary to educational rights – the large numbers of working children in Asia and Africa in particular, are testament to this – contrary to the sometimes simplistic presentation of the former following in sequence from the latter.

Improving the quality of schooling within a broader equity perspective requires two key shifts in education provision. One is to improve the governance of education services, improving the accountability of the providers, and strengthening the "voice" of the users. The second is to develop a vision that underlies the provision of quality schooling. This vision needs to maximize the potential of education to expand critical skills and develop the ability of citizens to recognize and respect social diversity and differences. These shifts are still a long way away, but are needed to ensure that structures of hierarchy and differentiation are not reinforced but challenged through schooling and related processes. Gender subordination has long been seen as reproduced through schooling, through curricula and curricular transactions. Moving away from "schooling for subordination" towards "schooling for empowerment" may sound idealistic, but it remains an important aspiration.

Female Education: The Challenge Ahead

Girls' education has received considerable attention in the EFA decade, and many policies have become commonplace in the policy portfolio of most countries. These are particularly focused on accelerating access to education through demand side financing and supply side expansion policies. Policies for encouraging girls' enrolment have succeeded where they have: *expanded access*, making schools available at shorter distances; *reduced the costs of schooling*, both through removal of fees and also through targeting incentives and subsidies at girls from economically or socially disadvantaged groups; *stimulated demand* through interventions with parents and communities, particularly mothers; and *improved the schooling environment*, including toilets and safety measures, particularly important for adolescent girls.

Despite these measures, major fault lines in policy and action exist. First is the issue of quality schooling. Behind the figures of improvements in enrolment lie bleaker figures of dropout, non-attendance, and non-completion. The quality of schooling remains the major challenge in most countries, with schools failing to retain children. Girls are particularly vulnerable to withdrawal from school as the high trade-offs of keeping children in low quality schools becomes apparent to families. Second is the issue of ensuring that girls move beyond primary or post-primary schooling to secondary and higher education. Transition rates remain appallingly low between the sub-sectors of schooling, and those girls who do gain access to secondary schooling are typically from better-off families. Under investment by governments in the secondary sector has typically opened up the sector to fee-charging private providers, squeezing girls out in contexts where returns to investment in boys' schooling are considered to be higher than those for girls. The importance of an enabling environment – for example, where labour market opportunities improve the returns to girls' education in the eyes of communities and families – cannot be under-emphasized.

Viewed from the perspective of international developments and progress, one of the reasons for these major fault lines has been the displacement of the broader, integrated agenda for gender justice outlined at the Beijing Conference in 1995, by more sectorally focused international policy targets and goals such as the MDGs and EFA. The challenge put forward by advocates for gender equality and redistribution at Beijing has been fragmented and broken down into more concisely worded goals and targets that are argued to constitute a more manageable agenda for developing countries and their governments (see Subrahmanian, 2003 for a discussion).

Underpinning the policy shifts that have been made so far are changes in the broader discourses of justification in the policy rhetoric. Rationales for investment in female education have significantly shifted over the last decades. From being of marginal interest to the international development community, education is now viewed as central to the core development agenda, taking centre stage in the MDGs, for example. Particularly notable has been the faith placed by the World Bank in the powers of education (Mundy, 2000) to transform human productivity, in terms of the development of skills feeding into economic growth, as well as its influence on social behaviour and structures, particularly the correlations between education and changes in fertility behaviour. The construction of these relationships has given rise to a highly gendered policy discourse, which on the one hand, views the accumulation of skills as a neutral process, not mediated by social inequalities and differences, and on the other, locates women predominantly as instruments of demographic change and family-based reproduction.

These rationales are not uncontested however, and there have been several critiques that have sought to expand the terrain on which education policy is shaped and implemented. The contributions from political philosophy, notably the capabilities approach advanced by Amartya Sen (1995) and Nussbaum (2000) and extended to education by Unterhalter (2003), amongst others, and to gender equality by Dreze and Sen (2002), have sought to place theories of justice and human development at the heart of policy debates. Other more focused critiques have also been made by sociologists on the methodological and analytical limitations of conventional economics-based approaches (for instance, Jeffery and Jeffery, 1998).

These debates are also implicitly normative, seeking to establish the underlying societal values to which education policy is oriented, and the ground on which education policy decisions are made and can thus be assessed and evaluated. In this paper, we move away from this normative arena, and seek instead to develop an analytical frame that allows us to locate educational policy within the broader social policy terrain, and in particular, allows us to follow the gender dynamics within education that results in unequal gender outcomes. Normative frames, regardless of whether they emphasize outcomes (human capital theory) or processes (capabilities), result in views that construct education

as a "silver bullet" (Jeffery and Jeffery, 1998). This paper seeks to avoid making pronouncements on the impact of education, but focuses more on the dynamics and processes within which education participation is shaped. The evidence base in this paper is global and general, but with important implications and relevance for the South Asian region, where the largest numbers of girls remain out of school and excluded from meaningful participation in quality elementary education.

In this paper, an attempt is made to go beyond the policy rhetoric to examine the challenges for girls' education when placed in the broader perspective of social policy. The analytical approach adopted here is less concerned with conclusively establishing what the effects of education are, but instead focuses on understanding the dynamics of female education participation through an integrated "social" policy perspective.

Following Kabeer (2003), we will analyse these dynamics in terms of ways of thinking about the "social" in development, with applications to education. Kabeer argues that the "social" in development thinking can largely be understood in terms of a concern with reproduction (as distinct from economic production), which in turn articulates with the conventional definition of "economic" aspects of human life. She identifies the reproduction of life (birth, care of family and child care), the reproduction of labour (physical labour, human capital, human capabilities) and the reproduction of society (ideological conditions, social conditions), as three distinct but fundamentally interlinked aspects of human life. Social policy in this approach, more broadly, is defined in terms of these processes of reproduction, and policies identified or advocated within this broad terrain are those that are oriented towards aspects of these different forms of reproduction. Gender-aware social policy would further address the gender inequalities arising out of these processes of reproduction that result in under-investments in female well-being, whether by state or by household, and redistribute resources in such a way as to redress these inequalities.

This approach is followed for two reasons. First, the underlying rationales for dominant education policy agendas and discourses speak to all three processes of reproduction – its value is defined variously in terms of its impact on the reproduction of life (lower fertility rates, better childbirth and child-rearing practices); the reproduction of labour (skills development, credentials for participation in the labour market, strengthening pathways to greater mobility and capabilities); and the reproduction of society (creating the knowledge base in society in a way that either reproduces existing ideologies and knowledge resources or transforms them, bringing new ideas into being). A fundamental question is the extent to which education policies within the EFA umbrella address these different dimensions of human and gendered experience. Each of these processes of reproduction represents sites that give rise to both opportunities for transformation in gender relations, as well as constraints. Second, it enables us to situate education participation and access within the wider context of opportunity and change in interrelated spheres of social, economic and political life.

Drawing on some global evidence, we develop an analytical framework for reviewing gender and education approaches, policies and practices from an integrated perspective. While many have called for an integrated, complex approach to gender (UNESCO 2003, GCE, 2003), reviews of policy and practice remain focused on fragments of the whole agenda. The discussion here is therefore structured around three themes (following Kabeer, 2004), as discussed above:

1. The reproduction of life and family

2. The reproduction of the labour force

3. The reproduction of society.

The analytical framework developed is put forward as a way of approaching what is increasingly being referred to as the agenda for "girls' education" (DFID, 2005). The emphasis on "girls' education"

as a global policy target is arguably reductionist, and minimizes scope for focusing on the relational dimensions of gender inequality as they are shaped by and respond to wider social processes. This paper argues that a "social policy" framework for education, as discussed in this paper is necessary to broaden narrow and instrumentalist arguments and policy prescriptions in female education, in order to achieve the ambitious global time-bound targets of universal female schooling and women's empowerment, as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals.

Constraints and Opportunities for Female Education: An Integrated Analytical Approach

Drawing on Kabeer's interlocking analytical framework, we focus on the ways in which prospects for female education are shaped and structured through different processes and institutions of social reproduction.

Reproduction of Life and its Relationship with Education

Families are critical sites for decisions about schooling, and often it is parents who judge the trade-offs that they might face between schooling for their children on the one hand, and their livelihood strategy or position within the community, on the other. The reproduction of social roles and the ideologies that underpin them result in conveying particular sets of values and choices to future generations. This happens implicitly via the gender roles that members of the household themselves fulfil, and explicitly by the consequences of the gender frameworks within which children of each sex are brought up. Households allocate time for different activities among their members, and they also allocate resources – for consumption, savings and investment, including those associated with the formation of human capital – between each of them. These allocations are influenced by the broad social and institutional framework of custom and opportunity in which households are located. Nevertheless, changing the factors that affect household constraints, opportunities and incentives is a critically important means of influencing their decision-making.

For girls' education, a significant trade-off is perceived to exist between their education, on the one hand, and their conformity with social expectations to marry and bear children on the other. In societies where education is seen as a bearer of both opportunity as well as a degree of autonomy and capacity to act as an agent (i.e. in their own interests), participation in school may reinforce parental concerns that a girl may receive new ideas that enable her to choose to defy convention and bring dishonour on the family by rejecting family/ community norms and instead act in her own interests. Control over marriage and sexuality is one of the key factors restricting girls' education. This is confirmed both by qualitative accounts of education in a variety of settings, as well as some evidence from countries that have made rapid progress towards gender parity through promoting conservative or "value-based" education, which has enabled parents to feel more confident about the impact of education on their daughters (see Mehran, 2003, for an account from Iran).

Finding ways to make households value changes in the opportunities and freedom for daughters is a long-term project with great implications for education. In the short term, programmes that encourage girls in school and work with families and communities to persuade them of the value of girls' education may help to shift household views and reproductive strategies. Girls themselves are often drivers of change, going to great lengths to attend school. They work hard and often outperform boys if given an equal chance. But for parents, girls' schooling may still represent a risk. Hierarchies of authority within the family may also mean that decision-makers are often tied into more traditional ideas about what is appropriate, and may inaccurately represent the aspirations of children.

Many rationales for opposing girls' education may arise out of a fear of change, and a fear of the impacts of girls' education on social relations within the home and community, and social customs particularly around marriage and child-bearing. In a study carried out in Ethiopia, some parents

mention the concern that after twelve years of schooling their daughters would be unable to perform housework and may not be able to find a husband, on account of being too old. Other views suggest that parents' also *assume* they know their daughters' aspirations and say that girls are only interested in marriage. Some views also reflect an awareness of the nature of existing social conditions for girls and women who break traditional norms – some fathers noted that girls face problems because they cannot find husbands or employment opportunities; they will get older have to stay with their parents and bring shame on the family; thus the only options are for educated girls to migrate to bigger towns and to lead a miserable life working as house servants or even prostitutes.[2]

In conditions where the prospects of female autonomy are considered unstable or risky, marriage emerges as an early form of securing a daughter's future. Early marriage emerges as a significant factor impeding girls' progress in many countries. Data from India for 1996 shows that 38 per cent of girls in India, 46 per cent in rural India and 22 per cent in urban India in the 15-19 age group were married. In rural areas of Albania and Tajikistan it is not uncommon for poor families to endorse the early marriage of girls to lighten the family's economic burden. In these circumstances, the early marriage (at age 15 or 16) becomes a reason to leave school.[3] Girls in the age-group 15-19 are significantly more likely to be married than their male peers in several countries (Wilson, 2003; UNESCO GMR, 2003-04). Marriage of children and adolescents under the age of 18 is very common in parts of the world but prevalence is difficult to assess. Many are not registered. Small-scale studies show, however, that country data significantly underestimates its prevalence (Save the Children, 2003).

Social pressures on girls and boys particularly crystallize around the stage of puberty and the development of adolescent sexuality. In many countries, adolescent pregnancy, both within and outside the institution of marriage, constitutes a major factor for the discontinuation of girls' schooling. In Malawi and Chile, pregnancy was often mentioned as the most important reason for girls leaving school early, though statistical evidence is sparse.[4] In Tanzania although early marriage is not an important factor affecting girls because of compulsory education and legislation that is enforced to imprison parents who do not enrol their children, pregnancy was cited as an important reason for girls dropping out. Pupils in all group discussions mentioned this, and often believed the problem to be caused by girls being attracted to luxury gifts given them by older men. In addition, high costs of schooling and the inability of poorer girls to buy school uniforms also encouraged them to seek sexual relationships. In Guinea and Malawi, although the policy has changed to allow girls to return after pregnancy, few girls opt for this partly because their parents were afraid they would become pregnant again, and partly because girls were afraid of ridicule.[5]

The experience of adolescence may render girls particularly vulnerable to rituals and practices that further entrench ideologies of domesticity and sexual subservience, or which may serve to reinforce beliefs about the differences in the sexuality of boys and girls. Rites of passage for boys and girls differ around the world, but in most cases, these reflect gendered norms and beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women in adult life. Many cultural practices aim to address the future gender roles of boys and girls and their rites of passage to the adult world, particularly referring to puberty, marriage and female sexuality. These cultural practices often emerge from or reinforce prevailing discriminatory attitudes against particular groups of children, be they girls, disabled or from particular ethnic groups. These cultural practices often change (sometimes for the worse) with ruptures in social order, such as conflict-induced displacement or migration, increasing poverty or pandemics such as HIV/ AIDS. This shows that cultural practices are not immutable, but they are often presented as legitimated by religion or tradition.

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[2] Colclough et al., 2003, cited in UNESCO, 2003.

[3] Magno et al., 2002.

[4] Colclough et al., 2003, Avalos, 2003.

[5] Colclough et al., 2003.

The conflation of female identity with the responsibility for the burden of care within the family continues to be a fundamental problem for gender advocates. The low valuation of females relative to males in terms of evaluating productivity and returns to the household, continue to determine the ways in which resources are invested in females. The implicit belief is that daughters marry away, and it is sons who care for elderly parents. This suggests that changes in the economy, with greater incentives for women to work, combined with the evidence from many societies that daughters are often more caring of elderly parents than sons, have started to alter these valuations and have helped to give an impetus to female education. Evidence of this comes from Southeast Asia where ideologies of female docility and caring have been somewhat shifted with the opening of new economic opportunities and the subsequent delays in the age of marriage and child bearing. These changes have also created incentives for families to educate their daughters.

However, the extent to which these changes represent real choices for women, and are a reflection of greater gender equality is debatable. Many young women's educational choices are shaped by considerations of the trade-off between having children and having the means to return to work with a guarantee of child care, and/ or better wages to enable them to purchase child care services. Furthermore, gender ideologies may not break down as easily as these changes suggest. Investment in female education may also be compelled by considerations that are based on underlying gendered norms. For instance, in Taiwan, Greenalgh (1985, cited in Baden and Greene, 1994) found that investment in female education increased to just the level that enabled girls to get jobs that then supported greater levels of investments in sons' education, which in turn derived from the view that daughters' income may be more easily used by families to support household expenditure. The next sub-section turns to some of these issues.

Reproduction of Labour and Girls' Education

As noted earlier, female disadvantage in education is often explained in terms of the limited value placed on schooling for girls. In some cases, education can be seen as dangerous for females in terms of opening up alternative conceptions of society and feminine identity, and also building skills for access to economic independence. The lack of attention paid to women's roles in the care responsibility and their almost exclusive responsibility for the reproduction of life within the home, result in the perpetuation of gender disadvantage. In terms of schooling, this manifests itself in the heavy participation of girls in domestic work relative to boys. Girls' socialization into domestic roles is a result of, and results in, wider gender inequalities.

The vast majority of working children, i.e. those helping to produce marketable output, in developing countries is engaged in agricultural work, typically on family-run farms. Accordingly, the work participation rates of children tend to be higher in rural than in urban areas. Child labour in export-sector factories primarily in urban locations is by no means the general case of child labour. In particular this is not a phenomenon found in Africa, where wage labour markets are underdeveloped. In agriculture, parents are usually the main employers of children. "A broad interpretation of the empirical literature suggests that the proportions in work and out of school are larger for girls than for boys in Asia, the proportion in work but not necessarily the proportion out of school is larger for boys than for girls in Latin America, and the proportion of boys and girls in work is roughly similar in most parts of Africa, although the girls who are out of school comprise a significant majority" (UNESCO, 2003, p.122).

Contrary to conventional assumption, child labour is not the inverse of school attendance. Many children from all developing regions, but especially African children, combine working on family-run farms and enterprises with attending school. Inevitably, however, there is a trade-off between work participation and school attendance in such circumstances. Achievement too is affected. The quality

of the school experience for working children is undermined not only by their more irregular attendance, but also by their ability to apply themselves while at school being reduced by their responsibilities outside it.

Gender differentials mark child labour. Although the data on child labour do not always show girls as being more heavily engaged in work than boys, because they are often more likely than boys to be classed as "inactive", girls are heavily engaged in household chores, and often in wage labour. That girls are often found to be engaged in wage labour even where their income contribution is not critical to household subsistence, as evidence from Pakistan shows (Bhalotra, 2000), demonstrates the extent to which girls' work is either a reflection of the socialization effect of girls' work, and/ or labour for girls being seen as a default option, i.e. something to do till they are married. The socialization effect is also evident in the gender segmentation of work, with girls generally involved in cooking, cleaning and the care of siblings, and boys engaged in collecting firewood, grazing and other activities outside the house.

Child labour may also be hidden in diverse family forms, rendering it invisible. The practice of fostering, studied most systematically in West Africa, is on the increase, as families bear the brunt of HIV/ AIDS. For girls, fostering may be a reflection of the demand for domestic labour; for boys, it may reflect a concern with improving their schooling and hence life opportunities. This may be particularly true of urban areas, where households take foster children into their care in order to socialize and enrol them in school (especially boys), but their strong inclination to host young girls raises the problem of the need for labour, especially for domestic purposes. The relationship between the custody of very young children and housework raises problems, particularly in households where both spouses work outside the home. A previous study based on Togo's 1981 census data revealed that female-headed households were more likely to host children, with a proportion of foster children nearly twice as high as that observed in male-headed households (29.5 per cent and 15.8 per cent) (Pilon 2003).

However, in several countries the enrolment rate in the countryside for children residing without their parents at the time of the survey was higher than that of the household heads' own children. This suggests that in these families the purpose of fostering is to enrol children in school, a situation that can involve boys as well as girls. The lack of a school in some villages or a great distance to the nearest one often leads parents to place their child(ren) with families (teachers if possible) living in a village with a school. The situation is quite different in cities. Except for boys in Côte d'Ivoire, in all the other countries children living without their parents seem to have lower enrolment rates than the household heads' own offspring, with under enrolment affecting girls more than boys.

Female labour is also implicated in overlapping markets – that of marriage and of formal and informal wage labour markets. Decisions to invest in females' education and allow their participation in the labour market may also be embedded in wider considerations such as their status within the marriage market. One example is the issue of dowry, a practice prevalent in India, in particular. The practice of dowry, which can be broadly defined as "the giving and receiving of ritualized wedding presentations – gifts, payments, and services – to seal the marital alliance between a young couple and their families" (Palriwala, 2003), is an age-old practice, but one which over the times has resulted in pernicious discrimination against women, as the giving of gifts, payments and services is now largely a flow from bride to groom. The escalation of demands for these presentations and the spread of the practice to communities that traditionally and historically did not follow it, has been seen in recent times as an indication of the extent to which it has ceased to be merely a ritual associated with marriage, but instead represents a lifelong claim by men over wives' families, based on a continual "reaffirmation" of the ties between two families marked by public display of giving from the wife's to the husband's family on selected occasions and events (ibid.). As Palriwala notes, "from being a sign of marriage, we can say that dowry has become a major incentive for men to marry" (2003, p.2).

The point here is that returns to education are often played out in the marriage market not just the labour market, with great gender implications. One can analyse dowry as a form of subsidy to educated males for the costs incurred in education as the value of dowry is often pegged to the education levels and/ or the income-generating prospects of the husband. The prevalence of dowry does not necessarily go away with rising levels in education, as the modernization theory may have us expect. In India, the educated middle-class is deeply implicated in this practice. The market rate for educated men is high; not matched necessarily by the market value of an educated woman. The belief that a husband must be superior to the wife means that incentives to keep educational gaps between women and men are embedded in the conventional notions of marriage and related practices. As Palriwala (ibid.) argues:

> For poor, middle class and salaried families, the fact of dowry is a disincentive in educating daughters. In a social environment where it is assumed that the husband must always be superior to the bride, this is not to be threatened by a wife who is better educated. Hence, the more educated a daughter, the more educated must be her spouse. The more educated her spouse, the better should be his economic chances. The better his economic prospects, the higher the dowry he can command. Hence, if this is to be avoided, it is better the daughter is not "too educated". The expenses of that education can also be better saved to pay for her marriage. At times it is suggested that educated girls may work and earn their own dowry and trousseau and it is true that in the urban context signs of this are seen. Girls justify their existence by reducing the burden of their marriage on their parents in whatever way they can.

Reproduction of Society Through the Schooling Process and System

As the previous sections have shown, households may base their decisions on whether to send boys and girls to school on a range of considerations, both short-term as well as long-term. Short-term considerations may result in households making trade-offs in their long-term interests, which have differential impacts on outcomes for boys and girls. Some of the factors that impinge on household decision-making may emerge from other institutional factors, particularly the functioning of the education system. Children's work in many contexts reflects the lack of alternatives offered by the educational system – either on account of the direct costs of schooling, distance of school from the home, poor quality of education, poor school infrastructure, discrimination within the classroom by peers or by teachers, or a combination of all these factors. Given the relatively lower social value placed on girls' education in many societies, these constraints are likely to exacerbate gender disadvantages, particularly by failing to take into account the important and distinct needs of young girls.

Schooling is one of the key sites where different ideologies reflecting dominant power structures are played out. While it is famously asserted that schooling offers both the space for the reproduction as well as the contestation of these dominant forms of knowledge production, the role of schooling in reproducing gender inequalities needs to be thoroughly examined. Reviewing evidence from India, Nambissan (2004) argues that classroom practices such as sex segregation for activities, combined with biases in official and hidden curricula, and the transaction of curricula by teachers, results in the perpetuation of stereotypes about the appropriate roles of girls and boys that have lasting impacts on the (low) self-confidence and self-esteem of girls. Girls often conform to stereotypes of shyness and studiousness, resulting in better performance in tests and exams particularly at secondary level (see the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2003/04 for a review of global evidence, Figueroa, 2000, and Bailey, 2003 on the Caribbean region), though at the expense of more active participation in the classroom when schooling is co-educational.

This raises the "schooling for subordination" hypothesis that many feminists have put forward, raising the concern that "education for what?" is not part of the international debates on education

and gender equality (see, for example, papers in Jeffery and Basu, 1996), but rather a linear "input-output" model of educational planning that dominates (Fine and Rose 2001). This means that issues of the content of education, the processes of curriculum transaction, and the hidden and "evaded" curricula (American Association of University Women 1992) have all taken second place in policy discourse to discussions about resources for schools and establishing the supply of schools. Where schooling provision is not informed by gender-aware analysis, the likelihood of state investment in education itself exacerbating gender biases and gender discrimination is high. In particular, questions about the gender equitable impacts of budgetary allocations, and planning priorities need to be placed at the heart of gender-aware strategies for EFA. Subjecting policy choices around the supply of education to rigorous scrutiny through a gender lens is therefore important.

Looking Ahead: The Need for a Systemic and Systematic Evaluation of Education Policies for Gender Equality

As the above analysis shows, not only is education implicated in all three processes of reproduction – of life, labour and society – but these processes of reproduction are deeply gendered resulting in unequal outcomes for males and females in education. Processes of reproduction often base themselves on taken-for-granted norms and customs that place differential expectations on females and males in a society. This results in differential investments in them (Kabeer, 1999; Subrahmanian, 2005), whether it relates to the roles and responsibilities of men and women within the institutions of marriage and family; the organization, uses and values placed on different kinds of labour contributions to the reproduction of families and the functioning of economies; and the ways in which the ideas of society and the social order are perpetuated. This is not, however, to suggest that these processes of reproduction remain the same. Policies that attempt to redistribute resources, recognizing the power of resources to help create opportunities and spaces for underlying "social" processes to change, can and have given rise to changes in the ways in which expectations of gender-appropriate behaviour, attributes and roles are played out in different societies.

However, given the depth of these ideologies in the interlinked arenas of life, labour and society, changes that occur often appear as ripples rather than representing deeper currents of transformation in the social fabric. Despite rapid progress towards improving the access of girls to schooling, there remain several exogenous factors: the growth of the non-state sector as a provider of schooling; the changing nature of employment opportunities; the changing aspirations of men and women under globalization with speedier and greater exchanges of ideas, desires and possibilities; and the impact of demographic transitions underway in different countries. All these continue to impact (variously positively or negatively) on the access, participation and completion of schooling by girls. These factors may be partially shaped by policy, and partially by wider social processes, or indeed by the interplay of policy and social processes. They represent both challenges and opportunities for governments to step up their commitments to female education, and to develop more integrated approaches to female education taking into account these diverse forces.

While these changing external environments provide continuous fodder for thinkers and analysts as to their implications for investment in gender-just social policy and human development, it remains clear, as noted at the outset of this paper, that policy measures for girls' education remain far too narrowly focused on improving access to schooling without sufficient consideration of the structural forces of reproduction that provide countervailing force to constrain demand for quality universal schooling for girls.

Policy developments, as noted above, can mediate to a great extent the processes through which societies order themselves and function. Of particular importance is the functioning of institutions through which policies are conceived, designed and executed. As Kabeer notes, "Institutions are critical within this understanding of 'social policy' because they mediate the processes by which societies

translate the resources at their disposal into the individual and societal outcomes which are of interest to policy-makers" (2004, p. iii).

Despite recognition of the need for institutional infrastructure that can deliver gender equity policies and programmes over the years, efforts to "mainstream gender" into development institutions has been a project fraught with difficulties and frustrations, and have been judged to be more of a formulaic attempt to resolve deep-seated structures of resistance to gender equality than to represent genuine efforts at social transformation. The entire project of "gender mainstreaming" has come under question more recently (see Subrahmanian, 2004), based on the recognition that the institutional dimensions of change have been grossly neglected. Ramachandran (1998) documents the loss of focus in the implementation of impressively worded national policies towards female education in India, whereby administrators down the line progressively lack the discourse and the resources that can sustain national commitments and visions.

The need of the hour is for serious and systematic evaluation of the policies and institutions that have been put in place to oversee the process of achieving gender equality in education. Pragmatic considerations have influenced many recent studies, which focus on what has been achieved through the expansion of access through supply side and demand side policies. While the focus on girls' education has been rewarding in making the issue an important policy concern, the underlying discourses and rationales have become restricted to piecemeal, stopgap programmes to accelerate change in gender parity statistics. Sustaining these changes requires movement towards a longer time-frame of change, and putting in place the building blocks required to create stronger foundations for gender justice. Developing an appropriate evaluative framework in education based on an understanding of education as embedded in wider social processes, will offer an important point of departure.

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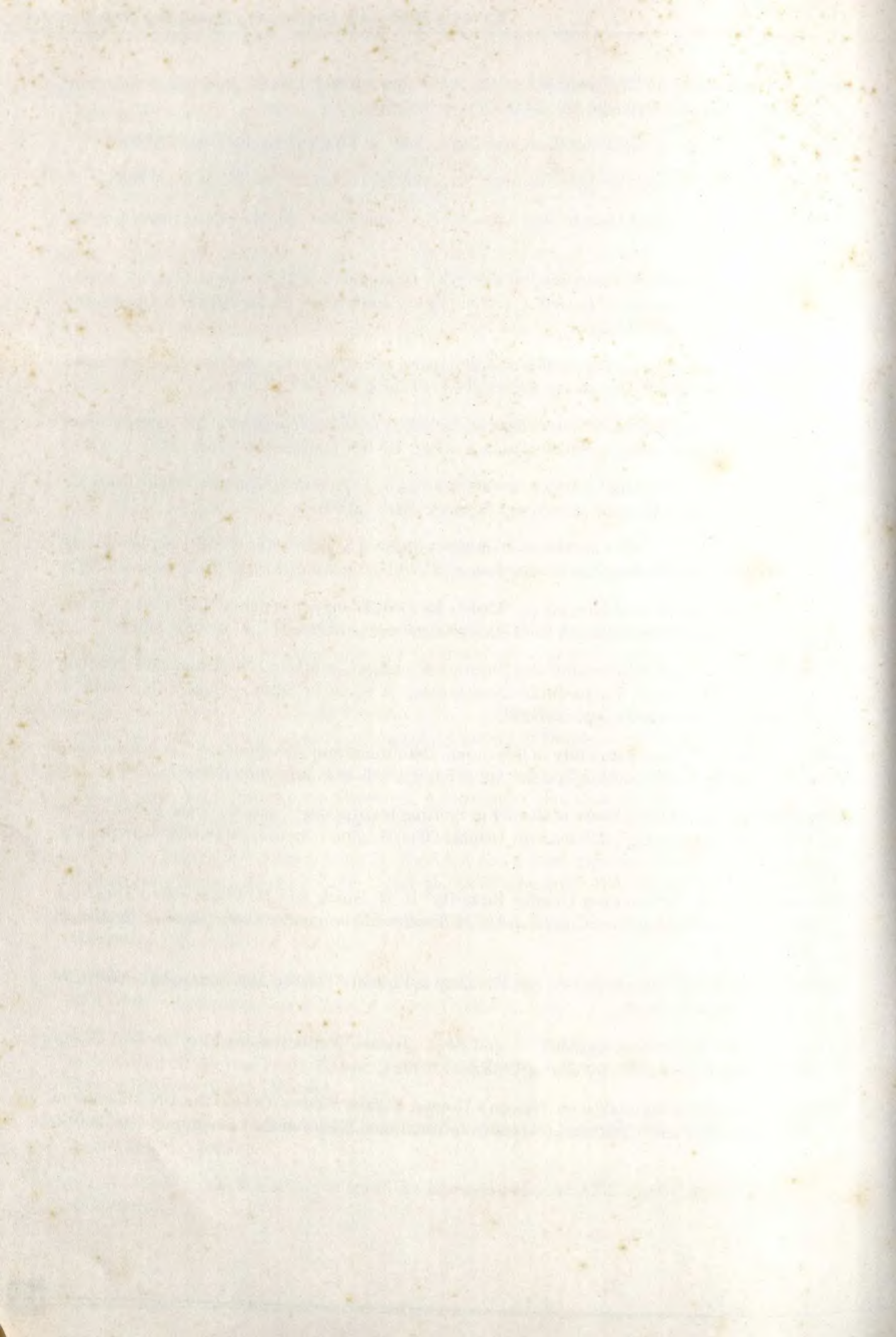Drèze, Jean and Sen, Amartya, *India: Development and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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